



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

A social statement on...

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action

This social statement was amended and then adopted by a more than two-thirds vote (863-26) at the fifteenth Churchwide Assembly on August 9, 2019, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This social statement comes in two versions. The short version conveys the statement's essence in 40 articles, containing the entire scope of convictions and commitments. The full version consists of those same 40 articles (in bold), along with a preface, a conclusion, and an explanation for each article, allowing readers to go deeper into an article's meaning. These two formats serve different needs. Both were crafted in the hope that the Holy Spirit will move readers into fruitful understanding, commitment, and action. Several supplemental resources are available to aid readers with this statement. All supplemental resources are available on the statement's web page, ELCA.org/socialstatements. Please note that underlined words in the text refer to the first appearance of words defined in the glossary.*

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Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action

Short Statement

I. Fundamental Teaching: God desires abundant life for all.

- 1) We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe God's intention revealed through the Scriptures is that all people have life abundantly and flourish.

- 2) We believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Every individual is dependent upon God, and all share in the God-given vocation to contribute their gifts to help all of creation flourish. Being in the image of the triune God means that we humans are relational, that we are interconnected. Just as we interact with God, we are social creatures relating with each other and all of creation.

- 3) Despite God's intention for creation, humans exist in a state of sin. Because we fail to trust God as we should, we are alienated from God, from other people, and from creation itself. Not only individually, but also collectively, we live out this alienation through disobedience to God, pride, complacency, self-abasement, and acts against others, all of which limit the abundant life God intends.

- 4) We believe that we are healed and redeemed from this alienation. That is, Lutherans confess that we are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what we have done or left undone. This promise means we are freed from bondage to the people and things we trust and love more than God or the ways we try to justify ourselves, sometimes at the expense of others. God's grace frees us and empowers us to love others as God loves all of creation.

- 5) Our focus as Lutheran Christians on Jesus Christ affects how this church understands the call to do justice. Because we are freed in Christ for others, we are able to respond to God's call to

love our neighbor as ourselves. In society, neighbor love takes the form of neighbor justice.

6) This focus on Jesus Christ also affects how we understand the Scriptures. While the Scriptures speak both Law and Gospel, Martin Luther emphasized that the Scriptures should be read by paying attention to what proclaims Christ—what carries the Gospel message of God’s grace and mercy to all people.

7) As Lutheran Christians, we recognize human reason and knowledge as gifts from God to be used for the common good. While the scriptural call to neighbor justice is clear, human reason and knowledge are essential to discern the specific forms, policies, and structures that best enable us to enact justice in particular contexts. Recognizing that the gifts of reason and knowledge are given to people of all religions and worldviews, Christians are freed to work together with them for the common good.

8) We believe that the church is called to live as the body of Christ in the world even while we struggle with the realities of sin. As Lutherans, we recognize that acting justly within family, church, and society for the common good is central to the vocation to which God calls all people.

II. Analysis of the Problem: Sin subverts human flourishing in many ways.

9) Though God desires fullness of life and equity for everyone, as a church we recognize that women and girls in particular suffer a range of harm and injustice due to sex (biological), gender, or both. In addition to sex and gender, the experiences of individuals and groups are shaped and complicated by intersecting factors. These include race, ethnicity, national origin, nationality (including American Indian and Alaska Native), religious identity, immigration status, sexuality, marital status, economic means, age, ability, embodied experiences, and education. This reality is known as intersectionality.¹ This statement’s references to women and girls are intended to be inclusive of all people who identify as

women or girls in the diversity of their individual and communal identities and expressions.

10) The experiences of women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, both in the past and in the present moment, reveal that they have often been restricted in realizing abundant life on the basis of sex (biological) or gender.

11) The far-reaching harm experienced by women and girls is rooted in a pattern of power, privilege, and prejudice, the key elements in any social system of oppression. This is the basis of the ELCA's understanding of racism.² When power, privilege, and prejudice are associated with sex, gender, and sexuality, sociologists use the terms patriarchy and sexism.³

Patriarchy is a social system dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on men's actions, voices, and authority. Patriarchy does not mean that males are bad and females are good, or that only males support this unfair system. However, in patriarchal systems, men are typically viewed as superior to women, are given more power than women, and have more authority than women. A patriarchal worldview and way of life grants male privilege. Sexism is the reinforcement of male privilege, which leads to discrimination. It promotes the silencing, controlling, and devaluing of women, girls, and people whose gender expression is different from the conventional expressions of masculinity and femininity.

Because people live within social and religious systems, everyone knowingly or unknowingly participates in this patriarchal system. Although patriarchy and sexism affect different people in different ways, as individuals we are socialized to conform to these patterns of power, privilege, and prejudice. This makes us complicit in maintaining social systems of oppression.

12) Although men and boys often benefit from this social system, patriarchal structures and values also harm men and boys, including gay and transgender men. They are harmed when they are pressured to conform to narrow gender stereotypes or are

unable to live out a false ideal of male superiority and control. People of all genders who do not conform to gender-based roles and stereotypes often are not seen or valued; sometimes they are violently oppressed and even killed. Men of all racial and ethnic minorities in North America may experience patriarchy and sexism particularly intertwined with white privilege. The message of white-identified patriarchy and sexism is that men and boys of color are not fully men and boys.

13) Some social and religious beliefs compound patriarchy. Most instances of gender-based harm are connected to commonly held beliefs and customs. For example, ideas that people are created into a hierarchy based on sex—being only male or female—reinforce and sometimes lead to gender-based injustice.

14) The ELCA celebrates that humans are relational beings and that we live in social systems. Positive, equitable social systems can lead to joy and gladness. However, social systems can also have negative consequences.

Even though individuals make choices within social systems, those systems are more powerful than any individual, government, culture, or religious community. Beliefs and customs are reflected in laws, policies, and practices within both secular and religious institutions, which makes them so systemic that they are difficult to identify and dismantle.

This church's commitment to neighbor justice compels us to expose how patriarchy and sexism are woven into individual, social, and religious life, causing harm to all people and even to all of creation.

15) As Christians, we see that patriarchy and sexism prevent all human beings from living into the abundant life for which God created them. Patriarchy and sexism reflect a lack of trust in God and result in harm and broken relationships. Just as this church has identified racism as sin, this church identifies patriarchy and sexism as sin. We confess that, as God's people forgiven in Jesus Christ, we are simultaneously liberated and sinful. We are broken, yet we are made new by grace through faith. This good news

is true even as we participate in cultures and societies that are broadly patriarchal and sexist.

III. The Christian Tradition: It is both challenge and resource.

16) In faith, this church confesses that Christianity has been complicit in the sin of patriarchy and sexism through certain beliefs, practices, and aspects of its history. At the same time, we believe God provides resources within the Christian faith and the Lutheran tradition to challenge the harmful beliefs and effects of patriarchy and sexism and to bring forth new ways of living.

17) The ELCA teaches that God's Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures. We also recognize that there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs in the Scriptures that reflect values rooted in what today we call patriarchy and sexism. Some aspects of the Scriptures reflect the cultures and societies in which they arose. Their continued misuse contributes to maintaining hierarchies and patterns of inequity and harm. A Lutheran reading of the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally.

18) The Christian theological tradition is full of ideas and teaching that can negatively or positively affect people. In particular, some doctrines affect our understanding of humanity and God more than others. Teachings about the cross and suffering, the image of God, the incarnation, the body of Christ, and the Trinity have sometimes been misused to support patriarchal beliefs, attitudes, church practices, behaviors, and structures. These teachings affect our use of language and our understandings of humanity and Christian ministry. At the same time, these doctrines can be liberating resources for healing the effects of the sins of patriarchy and sexism.

19) The central Lutheran belief that we are justified by grace through faith empowers this church to challenge patriarchy

and sexism, which devalue people according to sinful human standards.

20) The Lutheran understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, in which the Word of God is connected with tangible, physical elements, grounds efforts to prevent the harm that sexism and patriarchy cause to the bodies, minds, and spirits of human beings.

21) The ELCA has identified sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation as the key principles for creating and supporting justice.⁴ This church commends these principles to create and support neighbor justice, specifically gender justice for the neighbor. Social and religious structures and institutions—including ideas, beliefs, religious teachings, laws, policies, practices, and language—must be assessed and should be guided by these principles.

22) The ELCA recognizes that some progress has been made to address patriarchy and sexism and to reduce their effects; however, more effort is required. We believe that this church, together with many other partners, can identify and challenge the complexities of patriarchy and sexism and advance equity. Gender-based equity happens through beliefs and ideas that are gender just and through laws, policies, and practices that support an equitable common good—abundant life for all.

IV. Response: The ELCA is called to new commitments and action as a church.

23) Propelled by these theological convictions and the robust resources of the Lutheran heritage, this church responds to God's call to justice with the following commitments to promote and support action toward a more equitable life together in Christ.

24) This church recognizes that the body of Christ is called to honor and support women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences in ways more

consistent with life-giving theology and faith practices. As a church, we commit ourselves to celebrating and affirming the gifts and insights that women and girls bring to every expression and dimension of this church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America specifically commits to:

25) Promote the practice and use of scriptural translation and interpretation that acknowledge the contexts in which the Scriptures were written and reject the misuse of Scripture that has supported sexist attitudes and patriarchal structures.

26) Promote theological reflection that responds to the gender-based needs of the neighbor. Teachers and theologians need to be honest about how church teachings have been misused to support patriarchy and sexism. More importantly, this church calls upon its teachers and theologians to work toward worthier expressions of the historic faith that honor God's desire for all people to thrive.

27) Use inclusive language (all genders) for humankind and inclusive and expansive language (other than human) for God. This church is committed to the deepest Christian understanding of the Trinity revealed through Jesus Christ and to the importance of imagining and speaking about God in faithful ways that expand rather than limit the expression of God's self-revelation and mystery. In particular, we support developing liturgies, hymns, prayers, and educational materials that broaden use beyond predominantly masculine language. This practice follows the scriptural witness that God transcends human categories. Therefore, as in the Scriptures, metaphors for and images of God should be drawn frequently from the lives of people of all identities and experiences and gleaned from nature in all its diversity. Employing inclusive and expansive language for and images of God helps human beings approach and encounter the God of beauty and love who reveals God's self to humanity in rich and mysterious ways.

28) Develop and support more extensive policies and practices within the ELCA that promote equitable authority and leadership

within this church in all its expressions. In many instances this requires promoting the leadership of women, with special concern for women of color. In other cases, this means promoting the participation of men in more varied roles, including those traditionally seen as “women’s work.”

29) Promote changes that are economically just, including equitable pay and benefits, for women in all ELCA institutions and organizations, with special attention to the situations of people affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

30) Seek and encourage faithful dialogue, discernment, and, when possible, joint action on issues of patriarchy and sexism with other members of the body of Christ and with partners of other religions and worldviews. As a member of a global communion, the ELCA affirms the Lutheran World Federation’s “Gender Justice Policy.” www.lutheranworld.org/content/women-church-and-society.

V. Response: The ELCA calls for action and new commitments in society.

31) This church teaches that the God who justifies expects all people to seek justice in earthly relationships, structures, and systems. The ELCA calls for sustained and renewed efforts through which women, girls, and gender non-conforming people experience greater equity and justice. The following commitments express this church’s firm hope for renewed social relationships and structures that benefit the common good.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to:

32) Advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them. Women, girls, and people who identify as non-binary must not be deprived of their human or civil rights. (See the ELCA’s social message “Human Rights,” ELCA.org/socialmessages.)

33) Advocate for and support the eradication of gender-based violence within the church and more broadly in society by addressing both the systemic aspects of such violence and the personal responsibility of those who perpetrate harm. (See the ELCA's social messages "Gender-based Violence" and "Commercial Sexual Exploitation," ELCA.org/socialmessages.)

34) Advocate for and support medical research, health care delivery, and access to equitable and affordable health care services, including reproductive health care, that honor how bodies differ and eliminate discrimination due to sex (biological), gender, or sexual orientation. (See the ELCA social statements "Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor" and "Abortion," ELCA.org/socialstatements.)

35) Advocate for and support economic policies, regulations, and practices that enhance equity and equality for women and girls, with special concern for raising up women and girls who experience intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA's social statement "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All," ELCA.org/socialstatements.)

36) Advocate for and support multifaceted understandings of social and economic roles so that neither our human traits (such as courage or compassion) nor our callings (such as business leader or stay-at-home parent) are dictated by our sex (biological) and gender. Encourage and empower all people to use their gifts for the sake of the common good, whether at home, at work, or in the public sphere.

37) Advocate for and support resources for families of various configurations and the communities in which they live. Empower parents and all who raise or care for children or other family members to nurture, protect, and provide for their households in ways that do not reinforce gender-based stereotypes. In particular, advocate for institutional changes that support and encourage men and boys to participate in all family roles associated with the home, caregiving, parenting, and nurturing.

38) Advocate for and support legal reforms, humane policies, and adequate services for migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, especially those who experience intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA's social message "Immigration," ELCA.org/socialmessages.)

39) Advocate for and support portrayals in entertainment, media, and advertising that do not objectify or stereotype people but rather show all people as capable of the wide variety of human characteristics and roles.

40) Advocate for and support means for increasing women's participation in local, state, and national politics, with special attention to the proportionate advocacy and support needed by those who face intersecting forms of oppression.

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action

Full Statement

A Shared Vision:

We trust God’s promises, and we hope for justice.

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) rejoice that God is always at work to transform and inspire us to new ways of living, ways that more fully embody God’s intention of abundant life. However, due to sexism, many are deprived of God’s good intention that all flourish. Over time and in many places, people have made changes to counter the effects of sexism. Yet we accept that we are called to seek even fuller measures of justice and equity for all those affected by this sin. We do not presume to have quick, perfect, or easy solutions as we work together with all people who strive for justice in the world. Yet, grounded in God’s promises, we know that Christians have both the freedom and the responsibility to serve all neighbors in love.

In the Book of Isaiah, God sends the prophet “to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor” (Isaiah 61:1b-2a). God promises new heavens and a new earth—for all God’s people. God envisions not only healing and freedom from bondage, but also gladness, joy, and abundant and flourishing life for all people, which we will feel even in the bones of our bodies (Isaiah 65-66). Mirroring a mother’s care for her child (Isaiah 66:13), God desires harmony and integrity for individuals and communities, physically and spiritually. God’s promise of new creation is the vision of what will come to be and the assurance of God’s faithfulness. What hardly seems possible will be possible, for even the wolf and the lamb will feed together (Isaiah 65:25).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims at the beginning of his ministry that he is the one through whom God acts to bring good news to the oppressed and captive, to heal, and to set free. Women respond to God’s promise. Mary proclaims God’s favor.

An unnamed woman anoints Jesus' feet. Women—among them, Mary and Martha—follow Jesus publicly and use their means to support Jesus' ministry. A bleeding woman trusts in Jesus' power to heal. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and “the other women” witness the empty tomb and the angels who announce the resurrection of Jesus; they spread the word that God reaches from the promised future to raise Jesus Christ to new life, as the first fruit of the new creation. (See Luke 1:39-56; 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 8:42b-48; 10:38-42; and 24:1-12; and I Cor. 15:20-23.) The incarnate and risen Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new creation God promises.

We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America join the witness of these women and live in the hope of God's promise of new creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We offer thanksgiving to the holy Trinity, whose love intends an abundant life for every person (John 10:10). We live in hope, anticipating God's promise of a just world without the oppression of sin and evil. God's vision in Isaiah is that people live in gladness, joy, safety, and harmony until old age—so that “your bodies shall flourish like the grass” (Isaiah 66:14).

We believe that the Holy Spirit is always at work through God in Jesus Christ to transform us, to draw us into the promised life of the new creation. In this church, we confess that we ourselves are always being made a new creation in Christ through baptism. Who we are becoming in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit gives meaning to who we are and how we act right now.

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Society and the church universal are gifts from God. Nevertheless, personal, social, and religious forces often work in opposition to God's desire for abundant and flourishing life for all. This church sees and denounces all the ways human sin interferes with flourishing. With thanksgiving for God's gracious promise through

Jesus Christ to break the bonds of sin, this church lives in the confidence that we are always being made new to love and serve the neighbor.

Love of neighbor is expressed in seeking justice for the neighbor. This includes gender justice. Gender justice is for all people and requires particular attention to seeking fuller justice for women and girls. Because we rely on God as a God of promise, this church speaks about sexism and the harm it causes for all people. Those who support gender justice are intent on righting gender-based wrongs that prevent the abundant and flourishing life God intends.

Gender justice is for all people and requires particular attention to seeking fuller justice for women and girls.

We in this church rejoice in the ways God's people are already being led forth in joy (Isaiah 55:12). We are thankful God gives the vision and sustenance to change what seems unchangeable, even as we wait for God to wipe away every tear (Isaiah 25:8). Most of all, we live in hope because, through Jesus Christ, we trust that God's promises will not fail.

I. Fundamental Teaching: God desires abundant life for all.

1) We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe God's intention revealed through the Scriptures is that all people have life abundantly and flourish.

From creation to redemption in the Christian story, the Scriptures reveal God's intention of abundant and flourishing life for creation, including for human beings. On the sixth day of creation, "God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31a). Creation stories tell of the goodness, flourishing, and majestic diversity that flow from God's creative and sustaining power (e.g., Genesis 1 and 2, Psalms 8 and 104, and Job 38). Throughout the stories of the life of God's people in

ancient Israel, God is ever-present, willing them into flourishing life and often showing them ways out of situations that seem to have no way out.⁵

The Gospels underscore God's desire for abundant life. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, embodies and proclaims God's desire. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). Jesus put this into action by eating with everyone, including marginalized people (Mark 2:15).

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Jesus lived compassionately, healing and casting out evil spirits (Matthew 14:14). Jesus criticized those who neglect justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23) and delivered God's call to respond to the needs of anyone who is disadvantaged, marginalized, and unjustly treated (Matthew 25:35-40). Jesus Christ embodied God's urgent and persistent desire for the well-being of all people yesterday, today, tomorrow, and in the promised, future life.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the healing of the nations and closes with a vision of new heavens and earth as the ultimate outcome of God's resolve (Revelation 22:1-2). This church believes the triune God intends creation to flourish and is ever at work so that all people may thrive.

2) We believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Every individual is dependent upon God, and all share in the God-given vocation to contribute their gifts to help all of creation flourish. Being in the image of the triune God means that we humans are relational, that we are interconnected. Just as we interact with God, we are social creatures relating with each other and all of creation.

As the Scriptures witness, all of creation originates from God, who sustains creation and will ultimately bring creation to its fullness. In Genesis 1, God speaks creation into existence; by a

word, humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). “Then God said, ‘Let us make *’ādām* [the Hebrew word for “humankind”] in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26a).⁶ Human dignity flows from the reality that all humans are made in the image of God. When we see one another, we see the image of God.

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In the ancient world, typically only kings were thought to be in the image of God. Genesis offers a striking contrast to a hierarchical view that sets rulers over those they rule or men over women. The point of the creation story in Genesis 1 is that all humankind is created at the same time and with the same value, in the image of God.

The account of creation in Genesis 2 emphasizes human dependence upon God as the one who gives us life and breath. In this text, God makes humans by forming them from the soil (*humus*), the source of trees and all vegetation. Humanity comes to life only when God breathes the breath of life into the first human.

In both Genesis 1 and 2, the emphasis is on God’s creation of humankind in unity and equality.⁷ A translation of the Hebrew text helps to explain this:

“[T]hen Yahweh God formed the earth creature [*hā-’ādām*] dust from the earth [*hā-’elāmā*] and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the earth creature [*hā-’ādām*] became a living *nephesh* [being]” (Genesis 2:7).⁸

In Hebrew, the word for “Adam” means “earth creature;” it is not a proper name but a poetic play upon the Hebrew word for earth. English translations of Genesis refer to “Adam” being formed first and refer to this earth creature as a male, but the original language never suggests that a man was created first.⁹ Rather, it recounts the creation of all humanity. Only later does the text refer to distinct bodies, called “Adam” and “Eve.”

The differentiation of humankind expressed in the creation stories communicates the joy humans find in having true partners, true peers: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23a). God creates community and family within an interdependent creation that wholly depends upon its creator, not upon a hierarchy of humans.

The Scriptures reveal the diversity and interconnectedness of creation. God creates a teeming universe filled with plants and animals, the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and humans—all remarkably diverse. We believe God creates humanity in diversity. Scientific research in conversation with the Christian tradition shows that this diversity encompasses a wide variety of experiences, identities, and expressions, including sex (human biology), gender (how humans understand and express themselves), and sexuality (sexual attraction).¹⁰ These are interconnected yet distinct aspects of humanity.

[God's gift of diversity] encompasses a wide variety of experiences, identities, and expressions, including sex (human biology), gender (how humans understand and express themselves), and sexuality (sexual attraction).

Many Christians, in the past and still today, interpret the creation and fall stories in Genesis 1-3 to support the belief that females are secondary to males and more sinful than males. For example, repeating an ancient belief, some early Christian theologians defined women as malformed men.¹¹ Martin Luther sometimes repeated the idea that women are inferior. Genesis has also been used to argue for seemingly fixed realities about human identity based on being male or female.¹² Some Christian communities and individuals continue to teach and practice these ideas.

The concept of “the image of God” has often been used problematically. Sometimes it has been used to describe men as a “fuller” image of God and women as a “lesser” image of God. In particular, the description of the woman being created second, to be the man’s “helper” (Genesis 2:18), has been used to reinforce

the idea that women and girls are inferior and subordinate. Actually, the Hebrew word translated in English as “helpmate” is a word most often used in the Scriptures for God! Misuses, misunderstandings, and the limitations of translations have led to and still reinforce beliefs and actions that devalue women and girls.

This church focuses instead on God’s delight in the diversity of creation, as well as God’s intention of equality, unity, and relationality within that diversity. God says, “Let us make humanity in our own image.” Just as there is relationality among the persons of the Trinity, there is relationality between the humans God creates and between God and humans. This reading of the Scriptures promotes an understanding of human diversity that is not limited by either a binary or a hierarchical view of gender.

We honor the image of God in others when we do everything in our collective and personal power to meet others’ needs and to empower them to flourish. We believe that God creates human beings not just in marvelous diversity but also with the intention of equity, including gender-based equity. The God in whose image

Just as God uses wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to create and nourish (Proverbs 3:19-29), humans are to use these same means to serve all of creation.

we are made calls us to use our creativity, freedom, responsibility, diversity, and compassion for the fulfillment of creation. Just as God uses wisdom, understanding, and knowledge to create and nourish (Proverbs 3:19-29), humans are to use these same means to serve all of creation. In creation, no human is granted domination over another human. Rather, all are given the responsibility to care for creation, including the responsibility to address the effects of sin (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15).¹³

3) Despite God’s intention for creation, humans exist in a state of sin. Because we fail to trust God as we should, we are alienated from God, from other people, and from creation itself. Not only individually, but also collectively, we live out this alienation through disobedience to God, pride,

complacency, self-abasement, and acts against others, all of which limit the abundant life God intends.

As Christians, we understand humanity's fall into a state of sin through the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "[Y]ou will be like God," (Genesis 3:5b) the serpent promises. The Genesis story shows that the human desire to be powerful disrupts God's intention for human flourishing and for the well-being of creation.

Sin is a condition in which we humans live because we do not trust God for our sense of identity and value.¹⁴ This may take the form of pride (being centered on ourselves), idolatry (placing someone or something else other than God at the center of our lives), or self-abasement (not recognizing our value and dignity as a person created by God). As a result of this broken trust in God, human relationships also become broken and distorted. We hurt each other, God's creation, and ourselves.

Particular sinful actions (sins) are expressions of our human life in a state of sin. Individuals, families, communities, institutions, governments, and societies can all sin. Sin is not only individual; it is also collective or communal. Sinful humans create structures, organizations, and societies that perpetuate sin, sometimes unintentionally. This is called "structural sin."

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God gives the Law to help us see humanity's sinful state—our sinful thoughts and actions and our sinful systems. It also helps to curb these. The Law helps us see that what breaks and distorts human relationships is sinful and unjust.

4) We believe that we are healed and redeemed from this alienation. That is, Lutherans confess that we are justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what we have done or left undone. This promise means we are freed

from bondage to the people and things we trust and love more than God or the ways we try to justify ourselves, sometimes at the expense of others. God's grace frees us and empowers us to love others as God loves all of creation.

The Lutheran tradition emphasizes that we do not have to do anything for God to be gracious to us. The gift of salvation is a divine work, not a human work. "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Romans 3:28). God's justification of us overturns both our own attempts to justify ourselves and our own injustice. Faith unites believers with Christ; union with Christ transforms believers. God's redemption of believers is not simply a transaction but an intimate relationship that influences who we are becoming in Christ.

Although we have been called into the freedom of the Gospel, we remain sinners. Martin Luther described this as being "simultaneously saint and sinner." We are freed in Christ to love and serve others, but our efforts to live out God's love are always imperfect. Through our baptism, we experience daily renewal, and so we continue to respond to the divine call to love God, self, and neighbor and to work for justice.

5) Our focus as Lutheran Christians on Jesus Christ affects how this church understands the call to do justice. Because we are freed in Christ for others, we are able to respond to God's call to love our neighbor as ourselves. In society, neighbor love takes the form of neighbor justice.

The Scriptures repeatedly remind us of God's call to show love and justice to others. The prophet Micah insists that what God wants from us is "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Isaiah provides some specific examples of what this means: "[L]earn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). The psalms describe the blessing of living according to God's intention: "Happy are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times" (Psalm 106:3).

In the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-33), Jesus teaches that compassion for others is how we express love for God; neighbors are people who need acts of love. Martin Luther reflected, “Now our neighbor is any human being, especially one who needs our help.”¹⁵ Neighbor love means we are called to be a neighbor. Depending on the neighbor’s needs, this may require not only direct service in response to an immediate situation, but also working more broadly for justice. Because justice is the form love takes in society,¹⁶ we refer to this as neighbor justice.

Neighbor love means working more broadly for justice. Because justice is the form love takes in society, we refer to this as neighbor justice.

Faith active in the form of love of neighbor is not our own doing but God’s gift.¹⁷ We respond to and exercise God’s gift by loving others. In society, this responsive love takes the form of justice for the neighbor in an unjust world. Grounded in faith and love, we seek justice for ourselves and our neighbors within congregations, religious and secular institutions, governments, and societies. This love includes gender justice.¹⁸

Reading the Scriptures with a neighbor-justice perspective helps us challenge and uproot oppression, brokenheartedness, and captivity. This approach can be understood as an extension of the traditional Lutheran focus on interpreting the Scriptures through the vantage point of the proclamation of Christ. When, through the Scriptures, we have heard the Good News of justification by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we are able to return to the Scriptures, reading them in light of the call to live out our faith in service of our neighbors.

Striving for justice for the neighbor and for ourselves encourages Christians to live, worship, and work in ways that empower all people to live with dignity, responsibility, equity, and justice. God in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, frees the Church to live now into the future God promises. Both as individuals and as communities, we are called into God’s new creation.

6) This focus on Jesus Christ also affects how we understand the Scriptures. While the Scriptures speak both Law and Gospel, Martin Luther emphasized that the Scriptures should be read by paying attention to what proclaims Christ—what carries the Gospel message of God’s grace and mercy to all people.

Lutherans understand the Scriptures as speaking both Law and Gospel—God’s judgment and God’s promise. Both Law and Gospel are God’s Word, but they have different purposes. God’s Law commands us to love God above all else and to live for the sake of the common good; it judges us when we fail. The Gospel is the promise of God’s grace and mercy freely given to us for Christ’s sake.

Luther taught that Christians should read the Scriptures through the lens of the Gospel promise: “The Gospel itself is our guide and instructor in the Scriptures.”¹⁹ Being guided by the Gospel helps Christians interpret difficult texts in the Scriptures in light of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This way of reading the Scriptures also frees us to look at the Scriptures within their historical and cultural contexts.²⁰ Some things apply to people in every generation, and some things do not. For example, Luther pointed out that some of the Old Testament laws were given by God to the Jewish people at particular times in their history; these laws do not necessarily apply to Christians today.²¹ Luther even warned against the temptation of “changing Christ into a Moses” by misunderstanding the gift and promise of the Gospel as laws and commandments.²²

Because of this Christ-centered focus, Lutherans not only interpret but also translate the Scriptures in ways that keep proclamation of God’s Word central. When Luther translated the Scriptures from Hebrew and Greek into German, he took great care to use language that Germans of his day could understand. Sometimes this meant using common German idioms instead of a literal, word-for-word translation of the original languages. Sometimes this meant adding a word to emphasize the central proclamation.²³ Luther always translated the Scriptures so that the living Word of God could be received by people in their context.

7) As Lutheran Christians, we recognize human reason and knowledge as gifts from God to be used for the common good. While the scriptural call to neighbor justice is clear, human reason and knowledge are essential to discern the specific forms, policies, and structures that best enable us to enact justice in particular contexts. Recognizing that the gifts of reason and knowledge are given to people of all religions and worldviews, Christians are freed to work together with them for the common good.

The Lutheran theological tradition places a strong emphasis on the appropriate use of human reason and knowledge. Thus, this statement draws on current scientific research, including the social sciences. It also assumes that such values as human rights are commonly shared. While sin can distort our use of these gifts, they remain important tools for work in the world, especially as common ground for working with others.

This statement draws on current scientific research, including the social sciences. It also assumes that such values as human rights are commonly shared.

This church recognizes that people of other religions and worldviews may accept some of the analysis and share many of the convictions expressed here. For example, many individuals of other religions and worldviews believe that all people, including every woman and girl, deserve full human dignity, equality, equity, and the opportunity to thrive. Many others share the conviction of this church that all people have the responsibility to seek and safeguard universal rights for others, as well as for themselves.

With thanks to God for the gift of reason, the ELCA offers this statement as a contribution to public discussion about how to understand and advance full and equitable participation of women and girls in an equitable society. This statement is an invitation to conversation with and action by those who may not share the same starting point of faith but who share underlying values, such as human dignity. This church seeks to join in common cause with all who desire that all people may thrive.

8) We believe that the church is called to live as the body of Christ in the world even while we struggle with the realities of sin. As Lutherans, we recognize that acting justly within family, church, and society for the common good is central to the vocation to which God calls all people.

As Christians, we confess that Jesus Christ is the true image of God (Colossians 1:15). In baptism, all Christians are unified in Christ and are equal members of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul compared the early Christian community to the human body. He wrote that Christians are united in the body of Christ, that this body has many diverse parts, and that the members of the body need one another. Members of the body that we think are weaker than others are, in fact, indispensable. (See Romans 12:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-18.) The body of Christ is made of physical bodies, of human persons. The health of the body of Christ is linked to our human flesh and blood.

In the face of ever-present ways in which we humans sin against each other, including in this church, we confess that God's Word affirms the goodness of our bodies, minds, and spirits and those of our neighbors. The Gospels testify to the full, embodied humanity of Jesus, who was born, walked, ate, slept, and wept. The Hebrew Scriptures, the Gospels, and the New Testament letters all teach that human bodies are a good gift of God.

Because of our understanding of the body of Christ, we are called not to objectify other people, diminish their worth, or define them by gender-based stereotypes. Paul taught that what happens to one part of the body affects every part of the body. This church seeks to value all people and recognize that we depend upon one another. We will not dominate or politicize other people but will respect them, promote their health and well-being, and suffer and rejoice together as we strive for justice for all bodies—indeed, for all persons.

II. Analysis of the Problem: Sin subverts human flourishing in many ways.

9) Though God desires fullness of life and equity for everyone, as a church we recognize that women and girls in particular suffer a range of harm and injustice due to sex (biological), gender, or both. In addition to sex and gender, the experiences of individuals and groups are shaped and complicated by intersecting factors. These include race, ethnicity, national origin, nationality (including American Indian and Alaska Native), religious identity, immigration status, sexuality, marital status, economic means, age, ability, embodied experiences, and education. This reality is known as intersectionality.²⁴ This statement's references to women and girls are intended to be inclusive of all people who identify as women or girls in the diversity of their individual and communal identities and expressions.

Grounded in the Scriptures and in Christ, the living Word of God, this church affirms that God creates humanity in diversity and desires all in creation to flourish. However, everyone does not flourish. Talking about this reality requires care and attention to the language and framework we use to understand the complexities of the situation and to serve all our neighbors adequately.

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which various forms of discrimination and oppression, linked to aspects of a person's identity, overlap. The concept of intersectionality helps to express the multiple discriminations many women face daily. This church recognizes that each person is

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uniquely created in God's image and that each person's identity consists of different aspects. One individual might be a mother, an employee, a Christian, and a college graduate; she might be middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, Spanish-speaking, and Latina. Some

aspects of this woman's identity are affirmed by the dominant culture in the United States (e.g., Christian, college graduate), yet other aspects are devalued (e.g., Spanish-speaking, Latina). Broadly speaking, the dominant culture treats some identities as ideal (e.g., white, able-bodied, heterosexual) and other identities as less than ideal, or even imperfect (e.g., person of color, older adult, lesbian). What the dominant culture affirms affects people's lives.

Many women experience intersectional sexism. For a woman of color, sexism in the workplace is compounded by the discriminatory effects of racism. If someone is also transgender, data show staggering levels of discrimination and violence. Intersectionality helps to explain why some women and girls benefit more than others within a society that operates with intersectional patterns of dominance and submission. For example, white women in the predominant culture in North America benefit at the expense of women of color. This is illustrated in arrangements in which women of color are often caregivers for the children of affluent white women.

Therefore, references to women and girls in this document mean all people who identify as women and girls. A word such as *women* often fails to convey its full meaning because our minds tend to default either to our own experiences and identities or to what the culture validates as a normative, "desired," or dominant meaning.

In the United States, the word *women* has been typically associated with being white, young, and heterosexual unless qualified with other adjectives. The life stories, challenges, hopes, and gifts of women of color, lesbian and other queer women, transgender women, women with disabilities, and immigrant women, for example, have been often ignored and sometimes maligned. By using women and girls to refer to us in all our diversity, this church seeks to shift our thinking from limitation or discrimination to inclusiveness.

This statement acknowledges both the usefulness and the complexity of the phrase *women and girls*. Social, cultural, economic, religious, and political groups use *women* to describe

women's experiences that differ from the experiences of many men. Nevertheless, the phrase should not be used to give the impression that all women and girls have the same experiences, gifts, or identities.

10) The experiences of women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, both in the past and in the present moment, reveal that they have often been restricted in realizing abundant life on the basis of sex (biological) or gender.

Women and girls from a variety of identities and backgrounds experience forms of oppression that affect our lives in profound and intimate ways. The personal experiences of women and girls are connected with larger social, institutional, and religious forces. For example, in the United States many legal rights were granted to women only over the course of the 20th century. These include the rights to vote, serve on juries, own land or businesses, inherit property, divorce, retain custody of their children, and attend any school for which they are qualified.

However, even when these rights were legislated, factors such as race and ethnicity, education, wealth, and social class intersected to exclude many women. This was the case for women of African descent, who struggled for many of those same rights decades later in the civil rights movement. Even in the latter half of the 20th century, women still had to struggle to secure rights pertaining to voting, safety, health care, and public life.

Legal, social, and religious forces continue to curb women's and girl's rights and prevent them from affirming, celebrating, and expressing themselves fully as God's good creatures and flourishing. The situation is extensive and complex.²⁵ Poverty and economic insecurity negatively affect women's lives. Far fewer women than men have access to wealth, and in the United States

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more women than men live in or at the edge of poverty. This is especially true for older adults, single women, divorced women, women of color, women living with disabilities, and child brides, which a number of states allow. Poverty rates among women and children in Native American and Native Alaskan communities, for instance, suggest that sexism is compounded by racism.

Women's earnings are not equal to men's earnings. Occupational pay disparities affect women's earnings. More women than men work in service industries, which typically pay less than other occupations. In addition, women in the United States on average earn less than their male peers earn with equivalent experience and expertise. This wage gap is even wider for most women of color. Furthermore, there are wide income disparities within groups of women by race and ethnicity. The term *glass ceiling* refers broadly to gender-based limits on employment, but women of African descent also experience what is known as "the black ceiling," and Asian women experience what is referred to as "the bamboo ceiling."

Work, money, and violence often are intertwined. Some occupations, such as food service and agriculture, are particularly fraught with gender-based discrimination and violence. Workplace and educational harassment and assault directed at women and girls curtail their safety, productivity, and livelihood.

The ELCA has teaching and policy on gender-based violence that guides this church in greater specificity.²⁶ On average, women, girls, and people with diverse gender identities experience high rates of gender-based violence. This violence includes but is not limited to domestic violence; intimate partner violence; sexual assault; rape; human trafficking; pornography; female genital mutilation; early and forced marriages; cyberbullying, stalking, and harassment; and murder.

Although men and boys experience some of these forms of violence, women and girls experience the majority of them at the hands of men and boys. Racism particularly compounds gender-based violence for some communities of color. For example, the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have consistently reported that Native American and Native Alaskan women suffer greater rates of gender-based violence and assault than do other ethnic groups. Society often blames women for gender-based crimes and oppression, excusing the perpetrators. A prime example lies in this society's culture of sexualized violence.

Objectifying and assaulting people, particularly sexually, has long been tolerated, often to the point where gender-based objectification and assault seem normal. Objectification and the normalization of assault are evident in the media we consume (including pornography),²⁷ the games we play, the male role models we idolize, the jokes we tell, and the behaviors we tolerate. Many of these distortions spring from stereotypes, of not only white women, but also women of color. It is further evident in the low rates of conviction and penalty in rape cases and the high number of untested rape kits across this country. All these factors together can be described as rape culture.

U.S. health care policies and practices also affect women's and girls' very own bodies. Because health care in the United States has developed from a male-centered model of physiology, disease, and well-being, the medical system sometimes operates as if women do not know their own bodies or as if their bodies are not their own.

Here again, women's health problems and the sexism of health care are compounded by intersectionality. For instance, women of African descent on all economic levels suffer from high rates of infant and maternal mortality, and many Latina women lack the reproductive and maternal health care they need.

A lack of affordable health care means many women do not get the care they need. In many regions, laws restrict women's access to reproductive health care. In the 20th century, many women and girls were forcibly sterilized because they were considered less valuable than white or able-bodied women. Forced sterilization continues, often in prison systems.

Bodies are further managed, manipulated, exaggerated, and made invisible by the media based on age, skin color, and body type. Not every type of woman and girl is shown in the media. Entertainment, beauty, and fashion-industry standards and practices promote narrow, unrealistic images of “acceptable” women’s bodies, erasing “unacceptable” lines, spots, colors, or features. The ideals generated by these industries shape the way people think about their bodies. Many women and girls develop eating disorders or seek plastic surgery as they pursue an idealized version of womanhood or girlhood.

Despite this cultural obsession with “perfect” women, sports, journalism, and entertainment (including Hollywood movies) are largely focused on men and boys and what they do. Even language referring to people in society is male-identified, with words such as mankind, chairman, alderman, guys, etc.

Women constitute a minority in U.S. civic and business leadership. The number of women holding political office is growing but still significantly lower than in other nations. There are prominent women in business, but the total number of women in top leadership positions with access to wealth and decision-making is still disproportionately small. Women who do hold office and prominent leadership roles in society often experience overt and indirect hostility, including gender-based discrimination, speech, and threats.

Religious institutions in the United States may limit and prevent women and girls from affirming, celebrating, and expressing themselves fully as God’s good creatures and from flourishing as God desires. Women of color continue to be woefully underrepresented in religious leadership. In this church, for example, there are gender-based inequities and discrimination related to compensation and benefits, authority and leadership, and harassment and violence.²⁸

11) The far-reaching harm experienced by women and girls is rooted in a pattern of power, privilege, and prejudice, the key elements in any social system of oppression. This is the basis of the ELCA's understanding of racism.²⁹ When power, privilege, and prejudice are associated with sex, gender, and sexuality, sociologists use the terms patriarchy and sexism.³⁰

Patriarchy is a social system dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on men's actions, voices, and authority. Patriarchy does not mean that males are bad and females are good, or that only males support this unfair system. However, in patriarchal systems, men are typically viewed as superior to women, are given more power than women, and have more authority than women. A patriarchal worldview and way of life grants male privilege. Sexism is the reinforcement of male privilege, which leads to discrimination. It promotes the silencing, controlling, and devaluing of women, girls, and people whose gender expression is different from the conventional expressions of masculinity and femininity.

Patriarchy does not mean that males are bad, and females are good, or that only males support this unfair system.

Because people live within social and religious systems, everyone knowingly or unknowingly participates in this patriarchal system. Although patriarchy and sexism affect different people in different ways, as individuals we are socialized to conform to these patterns of power, privilege, and prejudice. This makes us complicit in maintaining social systems of oppression.

Although the dominant culture in the United States often emphasizes individualism, the Scriptures and human reason also stress the importance of social or communal understandings of life and the world. To respond in love to the problems experienced by women, girls, and people who identify as non-binary, we must move beyond individual experiences to analyze how patriarchy functions as a social system. This church believes we need to address the roots of the problems that threaten abundant life.

An honest assessment of patriarchy can be hard to face, yet it is necessary in order to address such a complex social reality. Harm and injustice result not simply from the acts of an individual or group but from policies, laws, attitudes, customs, habits, words, images, and religious beliefs and practices that inform and sanction those acts.

As a society, we have fostered patriarchal values that permeate our social organization and impair the distribution of goods and services, the application of justice, and the division of labor. Sexism (that which supports male privilege) affects human imagination and convictions, which influence how individuals and groups understand gender, human bodies, employment, immigration policies, and gender-based violence. Sexism sustains human trafficking and the politicization of the female body and health care, including reproductive health care.³¹

Because of our convictions about the right use of reason and knowledge in our shared pursuit of justice, this statement draws on the results of current scientific research as a basis for our work. A scientific consensus now holds that there are more than two biological sexes and more than two genders. Studies of humans reveal rich diversity, showing that individuals do not neatly fall into two categories. Some people are intersex: their bodies are neither male nor female. People have a diversity of characteristics, most of which cannot be assigned exclusively to one sex or gender or another. Among humans, sex and gender are more accurately characterized as multidimensional.³²

It is not possible to address patriarchy and sexism without recognizing these scientific insights. Much harm has been caused by systems and worldviews that assume a binary division of sex (bodies) and gender (characteristics). These patriarchal systems enforce this binary division with various levels of control and violence that affect everyone.

12) Although men and boys often benefit from this social system, patriarchal structures and values also harm men and boys, including gay and transgender men. They are harmed when they are pressured to conform to narrow gender stereotypes or are unable to live out a false ideal of male superiority and control. People of all genders who do not conform to gender-based roles and stereotypes often are not seen or valued; sometimes they are violently oppressed and even killed. Men of all racial and ethnic minorities in North America may experience patriarchy and sexism particularly intertwined with white privilege. The message of white-identified patriarchy and sexism is that men and boys of color are not fully men and boys.

Men and boys also suffer mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually from the dehumanization of patriarchy and sexism, which distorts how they see others and themselves. Misogyny, a deep-seated hatred of the female and feminine, is an ancient problem that still informs contemporary life, even when unintentional. Misogynistic

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values can instill men and boys with a false sense of superiority; patriarchy and sexism can contribute to exaggerated ideals of dominance and control, usually violent, that men and boys are expected to display. If they fail to match the ideal model of masculinity, they can be targets of hatred, harassment, bullying, and violence. These expectations go hand in hand with denying and suppressing vulnerability, empathy, and interdependence. This is toxic masculinity. The effect of toxic masculinity is that men and boys trying to live by its code hurt themselves and others, including other men and boys. The effect is harm to society.

The ideals of patriarchy and sexism can prevent men and boys from having meaningful friendships with other men and boys, and they are often punished when they try to resist male privilege or

to live in a way that is authentic to their sense of self. Cut off from emotions, interactions, activities, and careers that are stereotyped as feminine, men and boys are also denied the fullness of life that is God's gift. Within broad social and religious systems, we can end up idolizing men and embracing toxic masculinity.

Although this is an overall picture of society, one should note that, within marginalized communities, patriarchy and sexism affect women and men differently. For example, while black lives and bodies are valued less than white lives and bodies in the United States, men of African descent may have more status within their communities than women of African descent do. This same pattern is largely true in many communities of color. However, within the broader society, men and boys of color are uniquely affected by sexism because white male privilege operates against them, too. The message is often that men and boys of color are not "real" men or boys. The pressure to conform to one idea of white, male-identified humanity denies the diversity of humans.

13) Some social and religious beliefs compound patriarchy. Most instances of gender-based harm are connected to commonly held beliefs and customs. For example, ideas that people are created into a hierarchy based on sex—being only male or female—reinforce and sometimes lead to gender-based injustice.

Early church theologians were often misogynistic, describing women as "the devil's gateway" and rebuking them as "a feeble race, untrustworthy and of mediocre intelligence."³³ Throughout much of the history of the Christian church, women were therefore excluded from Christian leadership, including ordained leadership; taught to be submissive in marriage, church, and society; and coerced to endure suffering and violence.

In the more recent past, the intersection of patriarchal violence, submission, and Christianity flourished in the mores and actions of colonialism. The United States was forged through this colonialism, and its patriarchal values continue to affect many people, including American Indian and Native Alaskan people, often in heightened

ways for women and girls from these various communities. For example, the intersection of state and federal laws and tribal laws virtually eliminates successful legal recourse in cases of sexual violence against women and girls from these communities. More broadly, this is illustrated by how people of color continue to experience the negative effects of colonialism on mental health.

Misuse and misinterpretation of the Scriptures within contemporary Christianity have also reinforced viewpoints and teaching about the inferiority of women. Many Christian churches continue to support the subservience and obedience of women and girls to men, sometimes in subtle ways. For example, the belief and practice that men are meant to be the head of the church and the family and that women are meant to be the followers reinforce a gender-based hierarchy of importance, authority, and value.³⁴ This is illustrated when some people rebel at having a pastor who is a woman or when they challenge her ministry, either subtly or explicitly.

Throughout history, human beings, including Christians, have often created hierarchies in which one group dominates another because of their differences. Not all hierarchies are inherently harmful, but hierarchies based on gender are. The Christian church has often reflected and taught a pre-Christian belief that all men and women are created with God-given dominant and subordinate roles. This idea that people exist within a complementary hierarchy continues to affect and infect people's self-understanding and relationships.

Some Christians, both in this country and around the world, strongly believe that men and women were created to live in complementary relationships with clearly defined roles. This means that a person's identity, self-understanding, vocation, and social roles are fixed at birth and willed by God according to sex (biological) and gender.³⁵ This understanding of complementary roles is sometimes described in terms of men and women as "opposites."

Not all persons, however, experience or know themselves to be defined in these ways. Stereotypes about male and female

characteristics cause harm because they shape our understandings of ourselves and others from a very early age. Limiting certain roles to people according to their sex or gender interferes with the expression of their full humanity and the vision of abundant life for all people. Placing these limitations on individuals also diminishes the social and religious communities in which they live. The idea that humans are to experience life through gender-based hierarchies contributes to the overwhelming tendency to value what is male and/or masculine at the expense of what is female and/or feminine. The result is male privilege, often expressed through toxic masculinity.

In Christianity, male privilege has been and continues to be expressed through a male-identified, male-centered, and male-dominant symbolic universe of language and images. Through its stories and theological tradition, the Christian imagination focuses on what men and boys say and do, even when women are part of the story of God's people from the beginning. Within the Lutheran tradition, the same holds true for hundreds of years of Reformation thought, even though women were part of the Reformation movement. Male privilege leads to ignoring women's presence, women's experiences, and women's voices.

14) The ELCA celebrates that humans are relational beings and that we live in social systems. Positive, equitable social systems can lead to joy and gladness. However, social systems can also have negative consequences.

Even though individuals make choices within social systems, those systems are more powerful than any individual, government, culture, or religious community. Beliefs and customs are reflected in laws, policies, and practices within both secular and religious institutions, which makes them so systemic that they are difficult to identify and dismantle.

This church's commitment to neighbor justice compels us to expose how patriarchy and sexism are woven into individual, social, and religious life, causing harm to all people and even to all of creation.

Social systems are necessary because we are relational beings. When social systems are detrimental to well-being, the Scriptures refer to them as evil “powers.” (See Ephesians 6:12 and Romans 8:38.) These powers dwarf any one individual, community, government, or culture, and they distort human flourishing. This church recognizes the systemic character of patriarchy in the way social and religious ideas and beliefs are linked with laws, policies, and practices that result in injustice. This combination of sexist ideas and beliefs with laws, policies, and practices leads to and reinforces gender-based harm and injustice, including gender-based violence.

The effects of patriarchy and sexism diminish, damage, and often destroy people. Our church’s faith and a commitment to neighbor justice require us to examine the various components of patriarchy and sexism in order to understand the harm they cause and to seek renewed, life-giving partnerships and approaches to an equitable society. The call to justice specifically means that we seek equity and justice for women and girls and others who experience oppression due to sexism and patriarchy.

15) As Christians, we see that patriarchy and sexism prevent all human beings from living into the abundant life for which God created them. Patriarchy and sexism reflect a lack of trust in God and result in harm and broken relationships. Just as this church has identified racism as sin, this church identifies patriarchy and sexism as sin. We confess that, as God’s people forgiven in Jesus Christ, we are simultaneously liberated and sinful. We are broken, yet we are made new by grace through faith. This good news is true even as we participate in cultures and societies that are broadly patriarchal and sexist.

Sin is not expressed just in individual acts. Sin is also expressed in organizations and institutions. Sexism and patriarchy are sinful because they foster

Sexism and patriarchy are sinful because they foster attitudes and actions that distort relationships, violate God’s law, and result in injustice.

attitudes and actions that distort relationships, violate God's law, and result in injustice. They are social sins that involve and affect individuals, families, communities, nations, religions, and cultures.

Because they are so deeply imbedded in our social systems, the power of patriarchy and sexism can be largely invisible. Because it is invisible, we are often unaware that everyone participates in some measure, sometimes in obvious and intentional ways and sometimes in subtle and unconscious ways. We may hold attitudes and beliefs and support laws, policies, and practices that harm even ourselves. This is the power of systemic sin.

In our liturgy, we name this systemic reality in the confession: "We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves." Once we understand our own participation in this systemic harm, we can identify it as sin, confess it, and, through the grace and strength of God, begin to act differently. We reject patriarchy and sexism as sinful because they deny the truth that all people are created equally in God's image and because they disrupt joy, gladness, and flourishing life for all people.

III. The Christian Tradition: It is both challenge and resource.

16) In faith, this church confesses that Christianity has been complicit in the sin of patriarchy and sexism through certain beliefs, practices, and aspects of its history. At the same time, we believe God provides resources within the Christian faith and the Lutheran tradition to challenge the harmful beliefs and effects of patriarchy and sexism and to bring forth new ways of living.

Some central emphases of Lutheran theology offer renewed vision and resources for resisting and dismantling patriarchy and sexism and for transforming social systems. This church believes that a Lutheran theological perspective rings true with insights into God's gift that we are a new creation in Jesus Christ and can live more fully into that promise by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our corporate confession, we recognize that we sin individually and collectively in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We do not always live and act as God intends. God's Law helps us to see that we sin and judges us for our failure to live up to God's intentions. The recognition of our sins leads us to confession. When we confess, we give up trying to justify ourselves and our actions. By grace, God forgives us, heals us, and frees us from the state of sin that alienates us from God, neighbors, and ourselves.

We do not always live and act as God intends. God's Law helps us to see that we sin and judges us for our failure to live up to God's intentions. The recognition of our sins leads us to confession.

As a church, we recognize that patriarchy and sexism harm people in many ways. As a church, we confess that we cannot justify our own participation in sinful ways of thinking, believing, and acting. We confess that our actions often reflect patriarchal Christian beliefs that portray women as subservient and inferior to men. As a church, we confess our complicity in the exclusion, exploitation, and oppression of those who do not reflect idealized understandings of masculinity. We confess not only overt complicity but also the complicity of silence and passive acceptance of patriarchal and sexist beliefs and practices.

As a church, we also believe and trust God's mercy, love, and forgiveness. We trust that, through faith, God empowers us to identify resources for abundant and flourishing life within the Christian tradition, through which God has been at work through all people, including women. We believe that we share the responsibility to address the ways in which the Christian faith and tradition have been used to reinforce gender-based actions and attitudes that in particular harm women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences.

17) The ELCA teaches that God's Word of Law and Gospel speaks through the Scriptures. We also recognize that there are words and images, social patterns, and moral beliefs

in the Scriptures that reflect values rooted in what today we call patriarchy and sexism. Some aspects of the Scriptures reflect the cultures and societies in which they arose. Their continued misuse contributes to maintaining hierarchies and patterns of inequity and harm. A Lutheran reading of the Scriptures through Christ, focused on the devotional, historical, literary, and theological aspects of texts, frees us from the harm of taking all the Scriptures only literally.

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Within the ELCA, we read the Bible in ways that are grounded in our theological heritage and that can reform sexist uses of the Scriptures. The Word of God is first and foremost Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Secondly, we encounter the Word as Law and Gospel in preaching and teaching. The canonical Scriptures are the written Word of God, which proclaims God's grace and sustains faith in Jesus Christ.³⁶ The Word of God is living and active. We accept the written form of the Word of God as the authoritative source and norm for faith.

Nevertheless, we recognize that many biblical texts originated in cultures that were male-identified and male-dominated, and that they say things about women and girls that we now recognize as harmful. Genesis 3:16, "[A]nd he shall rule over you," seems to support patriarchy if read as a reflection of God's original intention for humans rather than as a result of human sin. Other Scriptural texts relate chilling acts of male domination, such as a host offering his unmarried daughter to a mob of men to dissuade them from raping a Levite man (Judges 19). Many Christian communities struggle with how to interpret such texts.

The New Testament reflects what now are understood as patriarchal values of various cultures through its rules and ideals about women. Scholars refer to these New Testament texts as "the

household codes.” One example seems to tie salvation to women’s fertility: “[Women] will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (1 Timothy 2:15). Another example admonishes wives to obey their husbands and instructs them on how to dress. Although husbands are told to be considerate and respect their wives, they are told women are “the weaker sex” (1 Peter 3:1-7; see also 1 Corinthians 11:6).

We recognize that the Scriptures have been interpreted within the Lutheran faith in ways that accept these limits on women and girls and sanction relationships of power and domination. Likewise, these interpretations grant men roles that afford them agency, decision-making power, leadership, and prominence in communities and societies. The result is an androcentric tradition. Our tradition’s complicity in patriarchy and sexism is connected to such biblical interpretation.

This misuse of the Scriptures continues to foster inequity based on sex (biological) and gender. It subverts the abundant life God intends. Even today some would deny women positions of leadership in the church or in society, calling the arrangement “natural” and citing such scriptural texts as “[W]omen should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate. ... For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

This church believes that God calls Christians into a different vision. Jesus Christ calls us to a new kind of freedom in service to God and neighbor. This is not a revision of the Lutheran tradition but a reaffirmation of its core emphasis. As Lutherans, we interpret the Scriptures in light of the Gospel promise. This emphasis on the Gospel as God’s promise characterizes a Lutheran reading of Scripture.

When scriptural passages are unclear or even contradictory, this Lutheran reading suggests that Christ, as God’s gift of forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life, is the lens through which such passages are to be read. Our church, for instance, places more weight on

Galatians 3:28 (“[T]here is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”) because of its Gospel focus, than on 1 Timothy 2:12 (“I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man.”). This church’s teaching about how to interpret the Scriptures reinforces this Gospel orientation. In this way, Scripture interprets Scripture.

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This church emphasizes a fourfold reading of the Scriptures: devotional, historical, literary, and theological.³⁷ We recognize that some passages were given to God’s faithful people in specific historical contexts that are quite different from our own.³⁸ This is why, for example, Christians no longer feel bound by certain Old Testament laws, such as kosher dietary principles, or by New Testament instructions concerning women’s hairstyles, jewelry, and clothing (1 Timothy 2:9). Our fidelity to the Scriptures does not require us to conform to the social and cultural practices of the ancient world. Similarly, this Lutheran interpretive practice extends to the writings of our tradition.

Although the Scriptures sometimes reflect patriarchal structures and values, this does not mean that God has prescribed patriarchal structures and values. We read the written Word guided by Christ the living Word speaking today. We do so for the sake of proclaiming a life-giving word for all people. This approach interprets the Scriptures with an emphasis on what the Word does; it frees us to read the Scriptures in such a way that God’s Word can be heard as genuinely “good news.”

18) The Christian theological tradition is full of ideas and teaching that can negatively or positively affect people. In particular, some doctrines affect our understanding of humanity and God more than others. Teachings about the cross and suffering, the image of God, the incarnation, the body of Christ, and the Trinity have sometimes been misused to support patriarchal beliefs, attitudes, church practices,

behaviors, and structures. These teachings affect our use of language and our understandings of humanity and Christian ministry. At the same time, these doctrines can be liberating resources for healing the effects of the sins of patriarchy and sexism.

Theological images and themes are used in multiple ways. The same concept can be understood and applied to reinforce a patriarchal status quo or to support gender justice.

Two interrelated themes of Christian faith have often been misused to encourage women and girls to accept and endure harm because they are women and girls. Sometimes Genesis 3:16 (pain in childbirth) is invoked to teach women and girls that they deserve gender-based suffering. Sometimes the language of taking up one's cross (Mark 8:34) has been used to encourage women and girls to endure their pain in order to be like Jesus. Some women report that their pastors have characterized domestic violence or rape as "their cross to bear."

Lutheran theology can help to reject the misuse of these biblical texts in such ways. First, Lutheran biblical interpretation reminds us that what is said to Eve about bearing children in pain has less to do with punishment than with pain humans experience after the fall.

Second, a theology of the cross can remind us that Jesus Christ suffers on our account. We are not called to endure violence for its own sake. We might endure violence because we confess faith in Jesus Christ and live as Christians, but women and girls are not called to endure gender-based violence. In addition, a Lutheran view of the cross reminds us that we see God hidden in suffering; despite Jesus' feeling of abandonment on the cross, we can confess that God is present even in the depths of our worst experiences.

A number of other theological themes have also been misused to affect how Christians understand God and humanity. These teachings include the image of God (See Article 2.), the incarnation, the body of Christ, and the Trinity.³⁹ It is important

to consider how these beliefs about God influence human self-understanding and relationships.

The Christian tradition confesses that God is infinite mystery beyond human comprehension. Human language and human concepts about God are never enough to know God. Unfortunately, language for and images of God in the Christian faith are often androcentric—male-centered or male-identified. Insistence on predominantly male-oriented language and images restricts our understanding of God, who is beyond gender, to one human category. This narrows our theology, our thinking about God. The use of only male language leads us to forget the incomprehensible mystery of God and can reduce the living God to an understanding of God to the figure of an infinitely powerful man. This is flawed theology.

Insistence on predominantly male-oriented language and images restricts our understanding of God, who is beyond gender.

In addition, insisting on only male language can make maleness itself a false idol. It can persuade Christians that men have more in common with God than women do and thus that maleness is a higher form of humanity. This is flawed theological anthropology—thinking about humans—and is pastorally harmful. If God is understood as male and women are seen as inferior to men, one can easily justify attitudes and behaviors that discriminate against and devalue women, girls, and people whose gender identity and expression fall outside of familiar categories. Taking God literally as male or only masculine also alienates people who are intersex.

Many voices in the Christian church have argued that the maleness of Jesus justifies sexist ideas and structures in church and society. Many Christians, including some in predecessor bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, have argued that only men should serve as heads of the church and the home, in part because Jesus was a man. In the New Testament and in Christian thought, Jesus was often depicted as a groom promised to a bride (the church). Sometimes this

description of the church as the bride of Christ has contributed to a male-identified God and his male-identified representatives in relationship with a female-identified church.

We must reject the idea that the maleness of Jesus is somehow related to redemption. In the original Greek, the Nicene Creed makes clear that God the Son became human (*an-thró-pous*), not male (*anér*), “for us and for our salvation.” The point of the creed is Jesus’ humanity, not his sex or gender. The longtime generic use of the word *man* in English translations has obscured the original meaning of the Nicene Creed and fed patriarchal biases and assumptions.

The biblical narrative that Jesus was male, compounded by translations that default to androcentric language, has led to faulty assumptions about the maleness of the Trinity. However, the Scriptures and Christian theology witness to an understanding of God that transcends gender. They offer life-giving ways to proclaim the Gospel so that all may receive it and share the Good News.

In the Scriptures, God is described as a mother in labor—also as a rock, a hen, and a bear (Isaiah 42:14, Psalm 89:26, Matthew 23:37; Hosea 13:8). God is not literally any of these, just as God is not literally a man or a father. For instance, Jesus taught, “[W]hat woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:8). Through the prophet Isaiah, God declares, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isaiah 49:15).

Teachers of the faith have amplified the multiple images within the Scriptures. St. Anselm of Canterbury wrote, “But you, Jesus ... Are you not that mother who, like a hen collects her chickens under her wing? Truly master, you are a mother.”⁴⁰ Julian of Norwich wrote, “A mother can hold her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender mother, Jesus, can lead us in friendly fashion into his blessed breast by means of his sweet open side.”⁴¹

These and other teachers of the faith invert the Savior's gender to say something important about faith in God through Jesus Christ. In fact, the Scriptures make use of gender inversion, such as when the apostle Paul compares himself in ministry to a mother in labor (Galatians 4:19). Jesus also subverted gender-based expectations when, washing his followers' feet, he cast himself in the role of a female slave or a wife—and then called on the male disciples to do the same thing (John 13: 3-5, 15).

At the same time, this church's understanding of the body of Christ goes beyond the literal, physical body of Jesus. As Galatians 3:28 reminds us, the body of Christ is inclusive; identity markers that we have regarded as irreconcilable no longer hold meanings that divide us. Just as "Jew or Greek" are not the only ethnic identities joined to and in Christ, so "male and female" do not limit the gender identity of those joined to and in Christ. Understanding the unity in Christ of persons of various identities frees us from the idolatry of the maleness of Christ—or of human maleness.

Although most Christian liturgy favors androcentric and Eurocentric language and imagery, expansive language and imagery are both scripturally rooted and theologically faithful. In their paradoxes and multiplicity, they communicate the mystery and intimacy of the triune God. Using inclusive and expansive scriptural and theological language and images therefore honors the Lutheran tradition. This church commends all Christians to retrieve and reform theological language, images, and themes so that they support faithful proclamations of God's grace in Jesus Christ to all persons.

19) The central Lutheran belief that we are justified by grace through faith empowers this church to challenge patriarchy and sexism, which devalue people according to sinful human standards.

A robust understanding of justification by grace enriches a Christian commitment to gender justice. A Lutheran expression of the doctrine of justification underscores gender justice as a concern of faith in three ways.⁴²

First, justification is wholly God’s work through Christ; we cannot justify ourselves. Justification as God’s act challenges the self-centeredness of self-justification, of trying to put ourselves above or before others, as with male privilege. From a Lutheran faith perspective, no particular group is superior to another based on sex (biological) or gender. Because God redeems us, we cannot rely on a belief that one group can justify themselves in the world or with God because of their supposed superiority or “headship.” Sin and grace are great equalizers. All Christians are sinful, and all Christians are equally dependent upon God’s grace.

Second, justification frees us from bondage. Being freed in Christ involves being freed from all that tries to replace Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives, including systems of patriarchy. This reality changes our life with respect to issues of sex and gender. We are freed to recognize God’s work in creation through human variation, human imagination, and human expression of gender. We are able to see that humans are not created to be limited in our experience of being human through a gender-based hierarchy.

Third, justification gives Christians the freedom of a new perspective—to be more concerned with what the neighbor needs and less concerned with following and enforcing gender-based rules and assumptions. We are freed to see and support one another in all our uniqueness. Justification helps us to see gender justice from the perspective of faith.

20) The Lutheran understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, in which the Word of God is connected with tangible, physical elements, grounds efforts to prevent the harm that sexism and patriarchy cause to the bodies, minds, and spirits of human beings.

Lutheran theology can help reorient sexist and racist theology and practices that limit the full participation of varied human bodies in the sacraments. According to the Lutheran Confessions, when the material things of water, bread, and wine are combined with God’s Word, God is really present: “Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water enclosed in God’s command and connected with

God's Word."⁴³ When we feel the water of baptism and consume the bread and wine of the eucharist, God is present to our diverse, individual bodies and in the unity of the church that is the body of Christ. Drawing on the apostle Paul, Luther taught that the Lord's Supper unites us in one body: "[S]o that by this sacrament ... and through this mutual love there is one bread, one drink, one body, one community."⁴⁴

We must continue to embrace our unity and diversity so that we welcome and uplift people of every sex (biological) and gender—indeed, every body—in our work together as the body of Christ in the world. God's love feeds the body of Christ so that it might live in love. The sacramental promise that God is present in water, bread, and wine, along with the good news that God became human, leads this church to treasure, hold, and advocate for the embodied lives of all people.

21) The ELCA has identified sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation as the key principles for creating and supporting justice.⁴⁵ This church commends these principles to create and support neighbor justice, specifically gender justice for the neighbor. Social and religious structures and institutions—including ideas, beliefs, religious teachings, laws, policies, practices, and language—must be assessed and should be guided by these principles.

As Lutherans, we understand that God intends not only individuals, but also cultures and governments, to develop in ways that enable all people to flourish. With other members of society, we affirm the national ideal toward which people in the United States continually strive—that all people are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We also believe that all people have the responsibility to safeguard these rights for others as well as themselves. Insofar

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as this ideal allows everyone to flourish, the ELCA joins people of other religions and worldviews to advance a universal vision of an equitable society in which all people participate fully.⁴⁶

Although we recognize that perfect worldly justice is not possible, this church holds that efforts toward justice should stress the principles of sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation. These principles guide us away from injustices against women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences and toward justice for all those affected by patriarchy and sexism.

The principle of sufficiency inspires us to meet the basic needs (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual) of all women and those who depend on them. This means, for example, that society must protect them from violence and provide them with equitable opportunities in education and employment. The principle of sufficiency supports not only passive respect but also advocacy in matters of health care, immigration, violence, human trafficking, and the workplace, for example.

The principle of sustainability compels society to provide all generations of women with the means toward an acceptable quality of life. This applies to both the emotional and the material aspects of life. Both church and society should evaluate how their structures ensure—or fail to ensure—that all people have livelihoods and the means for well-being.

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The principle of solidarity commits society to see and experience our own well-being as connected to the well-being of others and their communities. It often involves people aligning themselves with others who have different experiences. Solidarity encompasses empathy and respect for the lived experience of women and girls; it encourages people not only to share in their suffering but also to participate in their liberation.

The principle of participation urges us to structure our communities so that women participate equitably in the personal, local, and political decisions affecting their lives. All people need to participate in the structures that affect their lives and the decisions that affect their communities. No one's access to decision-making should be limited by sex or gender.

22) The ELCA recognizes that some progress has been made to address patriarchy and sexism and to reduce their effects; however, more effort is required. We believe that this church, together with many other partners, can identify and challenge the complexities of patriarchy and sexism and advance equity. Gender-based equity happens through beliefs and ideas that are gender-just and through laws, policies, and practices that support an equitable common good— abundant life for all.

Working together, people from many walks of life have brought about change in the North American context, diluting the power of patriarchy and sexism. Positive social and religious views about gender have influenced laws and policies that advance women's rights; conversely, changes in laws have positively influenced social and religious views. This nation and this church have seen and supported many positive changes in attitudes and laws that have helped women and girls to thrive, but more work remains to be done to support neighbor justice.

Individuals and groups must challenge harmful social ideas and practices, reject sexist religious beliefs, and work to change laws, policies, and practices that justify and reinforce patriarchy. When enough people—especially people of faith—work, pray, stand, and struggle together, they can transform attitudes, beliefs, laws, policies, and practices so that all people of all sexes and genders enjoy God's vision of abundant life.

IV. Response: The ELCA is called to new commitments and action as a church.

23) Propelled by these theological convictions and the robust resources of the Lutheran heritage, this church responds to God's call to justice with the following commitments to promote and support action toward a more equitable life together in Christ.

This section draws out the implications of this statement's convictions, analysis, and resources in our tradition. It sets forth this church's commitments to reshape beliefs, attitudes, policies, and practices. Inevitably, meeting such commitments draws upon judgments of reason in discerning what exactly must be done, when it must be done, and how. The process may involve difficult conversations and unforeseen challenges calling for both determination and patience. The particulars may well be subject to correction and further deliberation. This church, however, views the following commitments as a signal that our life together in Christ can be renewed in ways that promote and support greater equity and justice.

24) This church recognizes that the body of Christ is called to honor and support women and girls from a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences in ways more consistent with life-giving theology and faith practices. As a church, we commit ourselves to celebrating and affirming the gifts and insights that women and girls bring to every expression and dimension of this church.

Over the centuries, women have carried immense responsibility in serving the church despite being denied ministerial authority. They have served through religious education, music, elder care, parish nursing, and Bible study. They have pursued their vocations in myriad ways that support the growth of the Gospel and the life of their local congregations. The Lutheran movement, including the ELCA, has only begun to recognize how we have failed to honor the full range of Spirit-given gifts that have equipped women and girls to serve.

The fundamental commitment needed, then, is not to a particular program, practice, or process. Rather, we are called to repentance that reorients perspectives and actions, and we commit to encouraging, celebrating, and affirming the full range of gifts prepared by the Spirit for use in every expression and dimension of this church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America specifically commits to:

25) Promote the practice and use of scriptural translation and interpretation that acknowledge the contexts in which the Scriptures were written and reject the misuse of Scripture that has supported sexist attitudes and patriarchal structures.

Drawing deeply upon our Lutheran heritage, the ELCA promotes an understanding of Scripture that both honors its Word-centered purpose and acknowledges its historical sources and contexts. This church listens to God's Word speaking through the Scripture to sustain Christian faith and empower the community for service and justice in the world.

Mindful of how the Christian Scriptures, through translation and interpretation, have been misused to support patriarchal structures and sexist attitudes, this church will promote translation and scriptural interpretation sensitive to the concerns of this statement.⁴⁷ Scriptural texts in which females are degraded, terrorized, debased, dominated, or valued less than males should be interpreted in light of God's resolve for abundant life through Christ.

26) Promote theological reflection that responds to the gender-based needs of the neighbor. Teachers and theologians need to be honest about how church teachings have been misused to support patriarchy and sexism. More importantly, this church calls upon its teachers and theologians to work toward worthier expressions of the historic faith that honor God's desire for all people to thrive.

This church affirms the gifts of the Lutheran Christian tradition—the faithful witness of the Confessions, the power of the preached Word, and the reflection of theologians. At the same time, in recent decades this church has begun to recognize how these treasured gifts have sometimes been misused. Even while proclaiming the life-giving Gospel and the call for service and justice, preachers and theologians often have omitted or suppressed the stories, reflections, and experiences of women and girls. For some, this suppression has contributed to a crisis of faith.

The commitment to articulate and proclaim the Christian faith in a more inclusive manner calls for renewed efforts from preachers, teachers, and theologians. It means preaching and writing that make full use of stories and insights from the lives of women and girls with a variety of backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences. It involves teaching and preaching about justification and a theology of the cross that recognize how the motifs of Christlikeness and suffering have been used harmfully. It entails teaching and research that reflect transformative understandings, with special concern around key doctrines such as Christology and creation.

27) Use inclusive language (all genders) for humankind and inclusive and expansive language (other than human) for God. This church is committed to the deepest Christian understanding of the Trinity revealed through Jesus Christ and to the importance of imagining and speaking about God in faithful ways that expand rather than limit the expression of God’s self-revelation and mystery. In particular, we support developing liturgies, hymns, prayers, and educational materials that broaden use beyond predominantly masculine language. This practice follows the scriptural witness that God transcends human categories. Therefore, as in the Scriptures, metaphors for and images of God should be drawn frequently from the

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lives of people of all identities and experiences and gleaned from nature in all its diversity. Employing inclusive and expansive language for and images of God helps human beings approach and encounter the God of beauty and love who reveals God's self to humanity in rich and mysterious ways.

Words are powerful because they shape how humans relate to one another. For this reason, the ELCA has long urged inclusive language regarding human beings in both worship and everyday use.⁴⁸ This statement reinforces that commitment. This church urges renewed efforts to move us together from the habits of predominantly male-oriented wording to language that embraces all people.

Words about God carry even greater substance and subconscious meaning because they are religious symbols. The God revealed in Christ defies all human comprehension and speech. Still, humans must use words and images to pray and praise. The words that are used carry historical depth and communal power and have meaning for an individual's self-understanding and relationships.

Moving beyond exclusive language and imagery presents a complex challenge, both personally and communally. Changing or expanding Christian symbolism may be both unsettling and life-giving. For instance, paternal or maternal references to God may be liberating for some people but deeply painful for others. Despite the complexity, this church urges Christians to work together to confront the problem of exclusive language and imagery because these contribute significantly to patriarchal religious beliefs and practices.

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The formulation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is at the center of the conversation. Many Christians think this is the only correct way to speak of God, which reinforces exclusively masculine

associations. Others think that the traditional Trinitarian formulation should be changed or discarded because it promotes a faulty understanding of God as essentially male.

The ELCA affirms the creedal witness to the mystery, relations, and actions of the three persons of the Trinity. At the same time, this church holds that exclusive use of a male-oriented formula to refer to God is problematic. The use of expansive language for God reflects faithfulness to God's self-revelation in the Scriptures and in human experience.

In our life together, we call upon leaders and members to enlarge the dialogue about and practice of inclusive and expansive language and images for God. It is vital to explore the often-neglected variety of symbols for God recorded in the Scriptures, and to plumb the historical insights found in theology and religious art. In this spirit, this statement urges the continued exploration and development of expansive liturgies, hymnody, and worship resources.

28) Develop and support more extensive policies and practices within the ELCA that promote equitable authority and leadership within this church in all its expressions. In many instances this requires promoting the leadership of women, with special concern for women of color. In other cases, this means promoting the participation of men in more varied roles, including those traditionally seen as "women's work."

In the 1970s, the three predecessor churches of the ELCA made independent decisions to ordain women for the public ministry of Word and Sacrament.⁴⁹ While multiple viewpoints were argued, these churches concluded that the Scriptures present a mixed record regarding ordination and that nothing definitive precluded women from serving in this office.

Since then, the experience of this church has shown those decisions to be God-pleasing, consistent with the words of the prophet Joel (Joel 2) and embodied in the Pentecost story of Acts in which the Spirit falls upon all without respect to age, gender,

nationality, or ability (Acts 2). Women serving in lay leadership, ministries of Word and Sacrament, and ministries of Word and Service have borne powerful witness to the Gospel and enlivened this church's ministry. However, individual journeys have been difficult for many, and the communal journey since 1970 has been agonizingly slow.

In light of this experience, this church gives thanks, rejoices, and remains committed to developing and supporting additional policies and practices that promote women's authority and leadership within the ELCA, both rostered and lay. Given the continual struggles of women of color for acceptance, equity, and leadership, this church's commitments with them require special attention.⁵⁰

This commitment to confront continuing sexism and promote equitable authority and leadership of women belongs to the entire church. It also includes encouraging men to seek more varied roles in lay service and on the roster of Word and Service.

The commitment speaks to, but is not limited to, call committees, boards, and councils. It requires attention to formal and informal mentoring and succession planning. It requires attention to practices in seminaries, colleges and universities, social ministry organizations, preschools and grade schools, and youth ministries. Together we can open ourselves joyfully to the Spirit, who clearly has used the gifts of female leadership to enhance and empower her work.

29) Promote changes that are economically just, including equitable pay and benefits, for women in all ELCA institutions and organizations, with special attention to the situations of people affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

In support of women's authority and leadership, this church must continue to seek new ways to redress economic injustice. As of this writing,⁵¹ rostered women of the ELCA average higher pay than ordained women nationally but their compensation remains inequitable compared to that of men within the ELCA. The ELCA is called to renew efforts to support equitable benefits and pay

across our church. These should include particular attention to women affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

These efforts should not overlook the economic concerns of lay women serving in church callings, including those serving in less-recognized roles such as office administrators, preschool teachers, or in ministries of hospitality. The various organizations and institutions of this church need to review their compensation, including insurance and other benefits.

Finally, this church needs to offer greater support for women's ministry and leadership in policies related to pregnancy, parental leave, and breastfeeding. Improved arrangements for ELCA rostered leaders and for employees of ELCA-related organizations and institutions should support these leaders and demonstrate this church's commitment to family.

30) Seek and encourage faithful dialogue, discernment, and, when possible, joint action on issues of patriarchy and sexism with other members of the body of Christ and with partners of other religions and worldviews. As a member of a global communion, the ELCA affirms the Lutheran World Federation's "Gender Justice Policy." (www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf)

Governed by the framework of this statement, we in this church acknowledge our responsibility to continue to address our own actions, attitudes, policies, and practices as members of the body of Christ. We believe that the Holy Spirit is leading faithful Christians, as well as people of diverse religions and worldviews, into deeper discernment about questions of patriarchy and sexism.

In our own exploration of these issues, we seek whenever possible to engage our Christian siblings in mutual discernment and common action, acknowledging our own complicity in patriarchy and sexism. This approach is apparent in the ELCA's "A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment": "The first word, which the Church speaks ecumenically, may well be a word of self-criticism, a word against itself, because we are called to be seekers

of a truth that is larger than all of us and that condemns our parochialism, imperialism, and self-preoccupation.”⁵² Dialogue, while necessary and mutual, begins through self-examination.

Given the diverse but strongly held perspectives in society and throughout Christ’s church, conversations about patriarchy and sexism can be challenging as well as promising. ELCA leaders and members encounter commitments and perspectives among neighbors of other religions and worldviews that are quite different from those endorsed by this statement. In our commitment to engage with and accompany our neighbors, we need to be clear about ELCA social teaching but also listen carefully to different ideas. This is part of how we seek mutual understanding and pursue neighbor justice. The goal is to join in honest conversation and to challenge each other to greater justice while accompanying women and girls in their own contexts.

The ELCA is grateful for the faithful and courageous witness of our global communion, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). While this ELCA social statement is situated in the diverse cultural context of the United States, we recognize the biblical rationale, principles, and methodology of the LWF “Gender Justice Policy” as a global benchmark toward conversation and common practice. In a spirit of “mutual conversation and consolation,”⁵³ the ELCA will continue to accompany and to be accompanied in implementing that policy within the global Lutheran community. Similar efforts by the World Council of Churches, supported by local and regional councils, also encourage us in our collective task.

We invite ecumenical partners, especially full communion partners, to work with us for gender justice in church and society. The fundamental biblical commitment to justice should undergird and guide our common attention to the problems caused by patriarchy and sexism, even when we have different ideas about how to remedy these

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problems. In those areas where we are not of one mind in our discernment, we will continue to walk together in the bond of Christian unity, seeking the Spirit's leading.

We also invite partners of other religions and worldviews, especially where we serve together in coalition, to continue to collaborate with us whenever possible in seeking justice for women and girls. That search is integral to the common good.

V. Response: The ELCA calls for action and new commitments in society.

31) This church teaches that the God who justifies expects all people to seek justice in earthly relationships, structures, and systems. The ELCA calls for sustained and renewed efforts through which women, girls, and gender nonconforming people experience greater equity and justice. The following commitments express this church's firm hope for renewed social relationships and structures that benefit the common good.

The Scriptures are clear that the God who justifies is the same God who insists that “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). The ELCA affirms that God's Law, in its civil use, permeates and undergirds basic structures of human society to support life and protect all people in a world that remains under the sway of sin. God works through shared human endeavor and intends that all people work together to deter evil and seek justice.

Lutheran Confessional teachings identify the primary structures of human society—the church, family, civil authority, and economic arrangement—as God's gifts. Justice is the measure by which God's Law guides and assesses these basic structures. Social structures and institutions that fail to do justice are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created them. They must be challenged and held accountable; this is a matter of great urgency because human life depends upon them.

In seeking the well-being of the human community, the Lutheran tradition places a strong reliance upon human reason and knowledge tested and exercised through the sciences and social analysis. Although imperfect, social movements—enlivened by the insights of human reason and knowledge—can be expressions of God’s work through the Law to bring about greater justice and social liberation. The women’s movement, broadly understood, is one of these.

In identifying the following aspects of society that require engagement, this church does not presume to have quick or easy solutions for the deeply rooted, intertwined, and complex problems that permeate earthly systems and structures. Time, study, effort, and discernment are required. Nevertheless, it is both a clear biblical teaching and a matter of neighbor justice that God’s people hold governing authorities and social structures accountable to their purpose, ensuring greater equity and justice for all.⁵⁴ These commitments to advocate for and support social renewal express this church’s firm trust that God works to create improved social relations.

In identifying the following aspects of society that require engagement, this church does not presume to have quick or easy solutions for the deeply rooted, intertwined, and complex problems that permeate earthly systems and structures.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America commits itself to:

32) Advocate for and support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies rather than discriminating against, objectifying, or devaluing them. Women, girls and people who identify as non-binary must not be deprived of their human or civil rights. (See the ELCA’s social message “Human Rights,” ELCA.org/socialmessages.)

ELCA social teaching supports human rights for all people, regardless of their sex (biological), gender, or sexuality. This stance is rooted in respect and welcome for all people as created

in the image of God and evident in the ELCA's longstanding commitment to protecting civil and human rights. While members may hold differing views on matters related to sexual orientation or gender identity,⁵⁵ this church is nevertheless united in opposing discrimination, objectification, abuse, or control of the bodies of women, girls, or individuals who identify as genderqueer.⁵⁶ The ELCA's commitment to civil and political rights helps to orient the changes and challenges addressed in the following commitments. Minimal steps include developing and enforcing laws, policies, and practices that do not deprive any people of their human or civil rights.

33) Advocate for and support the eradication of gender-based violence within the church and more broadly in society by addressing both the systemic aspects of such violence and the personal responsibility of those who perpetrate harm. (See the ELCA's social messages "Gender-based Violence" and "Commercial Sexual Exploitation," ELCA.org/socialmessages.)

All people deserve safety and protection from violence, along with due process and support when violence is experienced. Although anyone may experience gender-based violence, the overwhelming number of attacks target women, girls, and individuals who identify as genderqueer. Such violence often occurs in domestic settings, yet gender-based violence includes any physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, economic, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for reasons of gender, regardless of the setting.⁵⁷

Although individuals are ultimately responsible for their actions, gender-based violence is rooted in systemic sin. A patriarchal social system affirms, sometimes implicitly, that women and girls should be controlled or subordinated. In this way, it underwrites, justifies, or at least permits acts of violence, whether by individuals or communities. Patriarchy, even when seemingly harmless or unrecognized, often reinforces the conditions, attitudes, and values that undergird harmful action.

The wide scope of theological, pastoral, and societal matters related to gender-based violence is addressed in the ELCA's social

message “Gender-based Violence.”⁵⁸ In it, this church calls upon itself and upon society to resist and change harmful attitudes, beliefs, and systems. This social statement affirms the analysis, insights, and commitments expressed there.

34) Advocate for and support medical research, health care delivery, and access to equitable and affordable health care services, including reproductive health care, that honor how bodies differ and eliminate discrimination due to sex (biological), gender, or sexual orientation. (See the ELCA social statements *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* and *Abortion*, ELCA.org/socialstatements.)

The ELCA teaches that a just society provides equitable access to health care for all.⁵⁹ Health is a shared endeavor, requiring both personal responsibility and social commitment. “Health care is the kind of good most appropriately given on the basis of need.”⁶⁰

The U.S. medical system is widely recognized as a global leader in research, prevention, and treatment. As a church, we are grateful for amazing medical advancements. At the same time, U.S. health care has carried a bias against women and girls in its practice and delivery.

This church gives thanks for those who have drawn attention to these problems. We urge everyone in medical research and health care delivery to recognize that diverse bodies have differing needs. We look for further advancement in medical research and the health care system, both rural and urban, that eliminate discrimination based on sex and gender, economic resources, ability, ethnicity, or race.

This statement affirms previous ELCA teaching on reproductive health care. Such care is to be provided according to need in all cases,⁶¹ and this church opposes any effort to roll back that delivery. While questions about how best to organize and finance mechanisms of care leave room for legitimate debate, the mandate for equitable access to reproductive health care remains.

The ELCA social statement *Abortion* (ELCA.org/socialstatements) addresses in a nuanced way this critical, complex, and controversial aspect of reproductive health care. It teaches that the life and decisions of someone who is pregnant, as well as the developing life in a womb, must be respected and protected through a complex assessment of moral and social factors.

On that basis, this church teaches that abortion ought to be an option of last resort for pregnant persons and the people in their lives. At the same time, ELCA teaching opposes laws that deny access to safe and affordable abortions. It urges efforts to reduce the conditions that encourage many to turn to abortion as the response to unintended pregnancy.⁶²

35) Advocate for and support economic policies, regulations, and practices that enhance equity and equality for women and girls, with special concern for raising up women and girls who experience intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA's social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, ELCA.org/socialstatements.)

Through human decisions and actions, God intends economic arrangements to support human thriving. This church's benchmark on economic arrangements is that they should provide "sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all."⁶³

The U.S. economic system has made notable movement in this direction for women over the last 40 years. However, economic inequality between men and women remains stark, especially when it overlaps or intersects with social identities. This is evident not only in pay discrepancy but also in other forms of compensation. Such economic inequalities disproportionately harm women and their families.

This church expects workers to be paid equitably for similar work. There should be no discrepancies in benefits nor in access to capital for business or investment. There should be no discrepancies in access to Social Security or pensions. Intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, and ability should not worsen the disparities.

There are various strategies to correct these systemic problems. Some stress regulations aimed at equity whereas others emphasize market freedom. The primary criteria should be what provides sufficient, sustainable livelihood, because the lives of providers and their dependents are at stake.

36) Advocate for and support multifaceted understandings of social and economic roles so that neither our human traits (such as courage or compassion) nor our callings (such as business leader or stay-at-home parent) are dictated by our sex (biological) and gender. Encourage and empower all people to use their gifts for the sake of the common good, whether at home, at work, or in the public sphere.

Some people and communities understand gender-assigned roles and characteristics to be largely fixed. These roles, often connected to the teaching of complementarity, are considered to be immutably defined by God or nature. The historical evidence demonstrates that many of the injustices and power inequities visited upon women have followed from that teaching. However, this church holds that roles within social structures are intended for the sake of human well-being and are provisional rather than fixed.

As social beings, we humans need social structures and guidance for the roles we live out. Social structures and roles are not solely social constructions; some aspects of biology influence some behavioral tendencies. Yet, the admission of women into professions such as law or the military in recent decades, and their success in those fields, demonstrate that gender-assigned roles are not immutable as once believed.⁶⁴ Social roles and structures require ongoing evaluation in light of God's intent that human community should flourish.⁶⁵

This church celebrates when women find their places of responsibility, whether as heads of a corporation or full-time homemakers. Either choice illustrates the calling to contribute to society's good. Men should explore similar variety in the roles they seek. Because there are many phases in each person's life journey, we also honor roles that are not compensated, such as

retirement or volunteerism. The aim is for individuals in community to seek the most life-giving roles within the structures of church, family, work, or civil society.

This church celebrates when women find their places of responsibility, whether as heads of a corporation or full-time homemakers.

Toward this end, the ELCA urges that society's laws, policies, and practices foster diversity and flexibility so that all may contribute their gifts to society, regardless of their gender.

U.S. courts and legislatures today generally support women's vocations outside the home. In addition, this society needs laws and policies that will eliminate hidden discrimination, including when one becomes pregnant.

37) Advocate for and support resources for families of various configurations and the communities in which they live. Empower parents and all who raise or care for children or other family members to nurture, protect, and provide for their households in ways that do not reinforce gender-based stereotypes. In particular, advocate for institutional changes that support and encourage men and boys to participate in all family roles associated with the home, caregiving, parenting, and nurturing.

This church continues to affirm the goodness of marriage and family but also recognizes that patriarchy has affected these relationships in harmful ways. The family is "an indispensable social institution because of its role in establishing conditions of trust and protection of the vulnerable."⁶⁶ We teach that families are formed in various configurations; the primary concern is how well they meet their intended purpose of helping all family members flourish.

Historically, in this society men have assumed the "headship" of their households and women have been expected to be subordinate and to fulfill roles with lower social status, such as nurturing and caring for others. In justification, Christians in the past, and many today, cite the so-called "Household Codes"

(Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1). Indeed, some point to gender-based rules presented as a form of works righteousness (1 Timothy 2:15).⁶⁷

By contrast, this church holds that God intends the leadership of families to be shared in full and equitable partnerships, which can be arranged in various ways. Social science research indicates that families and households benefit most when roles are adjusted according to the personalities and circumstances involved rather than fixed according to gender, insisting on the male as sole head of the house.⁶⁸

God intends the leadership of families to be shared in full and equitable partnerships, which can be arranged in various ways.

Such adjustments empower those who raise or care for children to share authority and household roles, which allows everyone to thrive. Flexibility permits shared responsibility for all caring relationships in a household, from infant care to elder care. This necessarily means balancing demands of work and income, individual strengths and interests, and the particular needs of the family or household.

Society's economic and social arrangements should provide generously in support of families. For instance, the one who gives birth needs adequate paid leave, but so do other caregivers. Every caregiver needs the opportunity to bond with a newborn and, in relevant cases, to support a partner's recovery from labor and delivery. U.S. society must find ways to increase paid family leave for parents and primary caregivers and to strengthen support for child care. Those returning to work after raising children also need profession-specific support for reentering the work force.

38) Advocate for and support legal reforms, humane policies, and adequate services for migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, especially those who experience intersecting forms of oppression. (See the ELCA's social message "Immigration," ELCA.org/socialmessages.)

This statement affirms previous ELCA teaching and policy that stress fairness and generosity in responding to newcomers in the United States. The ELCA's commitment to U.S. legal and policy reform includes several social-policy resolutions anchored by compassion, justice, and wisdom.⁶⁹ Those resolutions prioritize addressing the root causes of mass migration, the unification of families, and just, humane enforcement.

Migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers often suffer more when they are women, girls, or gender non-conforming people. At every point in their journey, and even when living and working in the U.S., they are especially vulnerable to degradation, rape, and other forms of violence. Their immigration status must not compromise their safety and well-being. On the contrary, their status as sojourners in this society invokes biblical injunctions for special care and concern (Leviticus 19:34).

39) Advocate for and support portrayals in entertainment, media, and advertising that do not objectify or stereotype people but rather show all people as capable of the wide variety of human characteristics and roles.

The power of entertainment and media to shape individual thought and cultural beliefs is immense and often underestimated. This church expects that entertainment and media should seek to be gender just. The gender-based stereotypes and sexist attitudes in film, print, advertisements, and social media are many and require serious efforts for reform.

The purpose of entertainment is to provide release and enjoyment, while art offers an interpretation of human experience that probes our understanding. This church encourages entertainment and media decision-makers to portray gender diversity and to show that individuals are capable of a wide variety of human characteristics and status. Consumers are encouraged to think critically about both the production and their own consumption of these media. Those who raise or educate children and youth are especially encouraged to seek greater media literacy.

40) Advocate for and support means for increasing women's participation in local, state, and national politics, with special attention to the proportionate advocacy and support needed by those who face intersecting forms of oppression.

The Lutheran theological heritage teaches that God intends governing authorities to serve the good of society. When women are underrepresented in this country's political offices and public leadership, the common good and the vocations of women are not fully served. This church encourages change in social beliefs and attitudes about women that often inform their exclusion from political life and public leadership. This church likewise calls for mentoring, education, and equitable practices toward political leadership, and for services for families and households that enable women to serve. Especially acute is the need to encourage and support women of color and others in marginalized groups to serve in political and leadership roles at local, state, and national levels.

**A Shared Challenge:
Living in hope, we are called to action.**

We of the ELCA acknowledge the inspiring and yet challenging vision expressed in the rich convictions and significant commitments of this statement addressing justice for women and girls. We recognize that this requires the difficult and critical work of confronting and dismantling patriarchy, sexism, and male privilege. We accept this summons with confidence in the triune God—revealed in the Scriptures and celebrated in Word and Sacrament—who lovingly intends that all people flourish.

We recognize as God's gifts the society and the church of which we are part, even while analysis reveals how patriarchy and sexism pervade our lives within them. We give thanks for the social advances made in this society against systemic and personal harm. Yet we affirm this statement's convictions and commitments as a summons to seek even greater justice and equity for all.

We are grateful that God grants us in faith both the freedom and the obligation for neighbor justice, a commitment to seek equity and equality for all. We celebrate the Holy Spirit's work in our church and pray she will empower us to live in hope and into action, because through Jesus Christ we trust that God's promises ultimately will prevail.

We celebrate the Holy Spirit's work in our church and pray she will empower us to live in hope and into action.

End Notes

- 1 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167.
- 2 *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995), 4, ELCA.org/socialstatements.
- 3 See Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Past*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: University Press, 2014).
- 4 These principles are evident throughout ELCA social teaching and policy. Examples include the social statements *Caring for Creation; Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All and Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*. Visit ELCA.org/socialstatements.
- 5 The adage that God provides a way out of no way comes from African-descent religious traditions and is developed by Delores S. Williams in *Sisters in the Wilderness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993). Two examples of God’s provision are the stories of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 16 and 21 and the Israelites’ passage through the Red Sea in Exodus 10.
- 6 See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 18, 78.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 8 Translation by Trible, 78.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 72-81.
- 10 For reference to the science and to an engagement by Christian thinkers, see Patricia Beattie Jung and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *God, Science, Sex, Gender: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Christian Ethics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010). It is important to note here that recognition of this diversity follows the contemporary scientific consensus. This statement does not revisit the matters addressed in the 2009 social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. It should not be interpreted as contradicting this church’s recognition of all four conviction sets identified in that social statement, p. 18, ELCA.org/socialstatements.
- 11 Although philosophers Aristotle and Plato initiated the belief that women are inferior to men and potentially “malformed” men, many early Church Fathers maintained a similar understanding of women. See Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious and Philosophical Conceptions of Women’s Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 21, 169.
- 12 This argument is known as an ontological argument based on what sex a person is. According to a sex-based understanding of humans, there are two kinds of human nature, based strictly on being male or being female. According to this idea, humans are particular, fixed beings strictly set by biological sex. This idea stands in contrast to a different understanding of humanity (a different

ontological argument), that there is a single “human beingness” (ontology) in which everyone shares. Understanding humans from this viewpoint allows for the actual diversity of human bodies and characteristics.

13 See Kristen E. Kvam on Luther’s reading of Genesis in “God’s Heart Revealed in Eden: Luther on the Character of God and the Vocation of Humanity” in *Transformative Lutheran Theologies*, ed. Mary J. Streufert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 57-67.

14 The Lutheran Confessions explain sin fundamentally as the failure to fear and trust God. “Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II,” *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 112. The Lutheran Confessions are Reformation-era writings, central to Lutheran theology and practice and constitutionally affirmed by the ELCA.

15 Martin Luther, “Letters to Galatians, 1535,” *Luther’s Works (LW)*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 27:58.

16 See Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 160-161.

17 See *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 2.

18 See also “The Lutheran World Federation Gender Justice Policy” (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2013), www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/DTPW-WICAS_Gender_Justice.pdf.

19 Martin Luther, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, 1522,” *LW* 35:123.

20 See the ELCA “Book of Faith” initiative’s emphases on reading the Scriptures, www.bookoffaith.org.

21 Martin Luther, “How Christians Should Regard Moses, 1525,” *LW* 35:170-172.

22 Martin Luther, “A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels, 1522,” *LW* 35:123.

23 Martin Luther, “On Translating—An Open Letter, 1530” and “Defense of the Translation of the Psalms, 1531,” *LW* 35.

24 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167.

25 The reader should consult ELCA resources or the many reputable resources for contemporary facts and figures that support claims in this article.

26 For a fuller explanation of this church’s teaching on gender-based violence, see “Gender-based Violence” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Gender-Violence.

- 27 “Commercial Sexual Exploitation” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001), ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Commercial-Sexual-Exploitation.
- 28 For up-to-date information on these issues in recurring church studies, visit ELCA.org. To date, reports have been posted on the 25th, 35th, and 45th anniversaries of the ordination of women as pastors.
- 29 *Freed in Christ, Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995): 4, ELCA.org/socialstatements.
- 30 See Johnson, *The Gender Knot*.
- 31 Many of these topics are addressed in ELCA social teaching documents. Visit ELCA.org/socialstatements and ELCA.org/socialmessages.
- 32 See Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 176-177, 235-239, and Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- 33 Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, Book 1, Chapter 1, and Epiphanius, *Panarion*, sect 79.1, respectively.
- 34 This view is an ancient problem rooted in philosophical ideas and in some religious teachings. See David Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Codes in 1 Peter* (Chico: Scholars’ Press, 1981).
- 35 See Linda Hogan, “Conflicts Within the Roman Catholic Church,” in *Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 343-339, esp. 325-327.
- 36 *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987), 2.02, http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Constitutions_Bylaws_and_Continuing_Resolutions_of_the_ELCA.pdf.
- 37 See www.bookoffaith.org/.
- 38 See Martin Luther, “How Christians Should Regard Moses, 1525,” *LW* 35:170-172.
- 39 See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God* (New York: Continuum, 2008).
- 40 St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) in Prayer 10 to St. Paul, “Opera Omnia” 3:33 and 39-41, based on Matthew 23:37.
- 41 Julian of Norwich (1342-c.1416) in “Revelations of Divine Love,” chapter 60, para. 6, based on Isaiah 46:3-4; 49:15.
- 42 See Mary J. Streufert, “Idolatry-Critical Justification and the Foreclosed Gendered Life,” in *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology*, ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner, Church of Sweden Series 9 (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 134-152.
- 43 Martin Luther “Small Catechism,” *The Book of Concord*, 359.

- 44 Martin Luther, "A Treatise Concerning the Blessed Sacrament and Concerning the Brotherhoods," cited in *A Compendium of Luther's Theology*, ed. Hugh Kerr (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), 176.
- 45 These principles are evident throughout ELCA social teaching and policy. Examples include the social statements *Caring for Creation; Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*; and *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility*. Visit ELCA.org/socialstatements.
- 46 See *Church in Society* and "Human Rights" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2017), ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Human-Rights.
- 47 The many different translations of the Scriptures from their original languages are not of equal accuracy or value.
- 48 "ELCA Style Guide" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2014), 48.
- 49 The Lutheran Church in America in 1970, the American Lutheran Church in 1972, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in 1976.
- 50 See "45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/45th_Anniversary_of_the_Ordination_Women_Ordained_Full_Report.pdf.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 The policy statement continues: "If it can speak such a word of self-criticism, the Church will be free to reject a triumphalist and magisterial understanding of itself and cultivate instead an understanding of itself as a community of mission and witness that seeks to be serviceable to the in-breaking of the reign of God." See "A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Vision_Of_The_ELCA.pdf.
- 53 Martin Luther "Smalcald Articles," *The Book of Concord*, 319.
- 54 *Church in Society*, 4.
- 55 See *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009), 19.
- 56 This statement uses terms regarding sex, gender, and sexuality that are preferred in 2019. Preferences will likely change in the future. See the "GLAAD Media Reference Guide," 10th ed., www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD-Media-Reference-Guide-Tenth-Edition.pdf.
- 57 "Gender-based Violence," 2, 6-7 and "Foundational Documentation for a Social Message on Gender-based Violence" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015), 6.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2003), 18.
- 60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 *Abortion* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 4-10.

63 *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1999), 3.

64 In 1872 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the right to practice law is not one of the privileges and immunities protected by the U.S. Constitution. Siding with the majority, Justice Joseph P. Bradley argued that “the civil law, as well as nature herself, has always recognized a wide difference in the respective spheres and destinies of man and woman. ...The Constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinance as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood.” *Bradwell v. Illinois*, 83 U.S. 130, 141 (1872) (Bradley, J., concurring).

65 *Human Sexuality*, 7.

66 Ibid., 22.

67 Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive*. These social stipulations were borrowed from the pagan social order of the first century and adapted by some New Testament writers. Despite their pagan origin, they have been treated as matters of revelation because they appear in the Scriptures.

68 Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers, in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 285ff.

69 Since 2009, policy actions include: “Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise Reform” (ELCA social policy resolution (SPR), 2008); “AMMPARO Strategy” (ELCA SPR, 2016); “Dream Act” (ELCA SPR, 2011); “Uniting American Families Act” (ELCA SPR, 2013); and “Welcoming and Advocating for Refugees” (ELCA SPR, 2016). These can be viewed at ELCA.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society.

Glossary

Androcentric: Male-centered, focused on men.

Binary (Gender Binary): The concept that there are only two genders, man or woman, which are inherently distinct and “opposite.”

Complementary/Complementarity: The belief that God gave men and women inherently different roles and purposes that complement each other to mutual benefit. Men’s roles have often related to leadership and decision-making; women’s roles have included obeying males and caring for others. These roles are informed by the structural dynamic of dominance (male) and submission (female). The imbalance of power in the relationship contributes to male privilege.

Domestic violence: See entry for “Gender-based violence.”

Equality: The idea that people have the same rights and should receive the same resources. Equality can refer to the equal worth of all people or to people having equal experiences of their rights and their potential in life.

Equity: Fair treatment of people according to their needs. The principle of equity takes into account that people exist on inherently uneven playing fields due to poverty, sexism, racism, etc. Because of these different contexts, individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have the same rights and abilities to make choices as others do (such as having a choice of quality doctors, careers, neighborhoods, etc.). The goal of equity is to ensure each person receives what each person needs to flourish and is not disadvantaged.

Ex. A simple example of equality in public restrooms would be having changing tables in all restrooms, because male caregivers may also need a space to change diapers. A simple example of equity in public restrooms would be putting more stalls in women’s restrooms in order to serve the specific needs women have.

Expansive language: Language (or imagery) referring to God that is not limited to humanity or human categories: water, a rock, a hiding place, a mighty fortress, etc. See “inclusive language.”

Gender: Identities, roles, behaviors, and attributes that cultures, societies, and individuals shape, most often linked to femininity and masculinity. The most common gender identities are woman/girl and man/boy, but other identities exist. For more, see “gender non-conforming.”

Gender identity: How a person understands one’s own gender; one’s internal sense of one’s gender.

Gender justice: Gender justice is expressed through equality and balanced power relations for people of all genders to live into their individual callings. Gender justice is sought by eliminating power imbalances among people at individual and societal levels, as well as eliminating discrimination against women and people who do not adhere to stereotypes associated with men and women.

Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer: Words that people who do not identify as “men” or “women” use to describe their gender (not sexuality). Their gender identity and/or biological characteristics may not completely fit with the dominant and expected ways of acting as, or being, a man or woman or a boy or girl. Each term might be used differently by different people, as an umbrella term or as a specific label for their gender identity. This document uses all three terms in an effort to be inclusive. (Terminology will change over time. Readers are referred to contemporary communities for up-to-date language.) For more, see “gender,” “intersex,” “transgender,” and “queer.”

Gender-based violence: Physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or other personal harm inflicted on someone for gender-based reasons, including but not limited to intimate-partner violence and domestic violence. This can include such things as catcalling women or bullying boys who are not perceived as “man enough.” Perpetrators commit gender-based violence to assert power over someone.

Genderqueer: See “Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer.”

Hierarchy: A system in which groups are ranked and certain groups have power over other groups. Sometimes this power over others leads to more value being assigned to the group or individuals with dominance.

Human trafficking: Coercion, abduction, and/or imprisonment of people for forced labor, often of a sexual nature. This problem is pervasive around the world, including in the U.S. Also known as modern-day slavery.

Inclusive language: Language that includes all genders when referring to humanity or God, for instance, using humans or humankind to talk about humanity, rather than man or mankind. See “expansive language.”

Intersecting, intersectionality: Humans have multiple aspects to their identities, including gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, social class, etc. These aspects of human identities are tied to systemic privilege and oppression; gender is tied to sexism, ethnicity is tied to racism, etc. Intersectionality describes the ways different forms of discrimination and systemic oppression affect each other and shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways. All human identities and all forms of privilege and oppression are made up of many intersections.

Ex. A woman of African descent may have a Ph.D. and make a healthy salary, but she will still suffer from racism and sexism. However, she would experience that racism and sexism differently from how a man of African descent, a white woman, or an impoverished person might experience them. The injustices she faces, therefore, may have solutions different from those for other people.

Intersex: As described by the Intersex Society of North America, a term for a variety of conditions people are born with: physical characteristics, anatomy, and/or genes that vary from standards

set by doctors' expectations for being "female" or "male." The term refers to the fact of biological variation among humans. Some people identify as intersex, rather than using the term solely to refer to a condition; others may also identify as gender non-conforming or a similar term.

Justice: Generally, justice refers to an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment, and reciprocity. This statement emphasizes the aspects of justice that include fair and equal treatment under the law, ending oppression based on power differences, and, as emphasized in the Bible, a right relationship with God and within community.

Neighbor justice: A term proposed in this social statement that is rooted in the biblical directive to "love your neighbor as yourself." This term expresses the idea that faith is active in love and love necessarily calls for justice in relationships and in the structures of society. Neighbor justice is meeting neighbors' needs across the globe and in our local communities.

Non-binary: See "Gender non-conforming, Non-binary, Genderqueer."

Objectification: Thinking of or portraying people as objects, erasing their humanity, emotions, and rights.

Ex. Catcalling, advertisements that use sexualized images to sell merchandise, and stories in which female characters exist only as props for male characters.

Patriarchy: A social system that enables men to have more power than, and power over, women and people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. A patriarchal social system is dominated by men, identified with men, and centered on men's actions, voices, and authority. In various ways, this kind of social system operates to control women, girls, and people who do not fit society's predominant ideas of maleness and masculinity.

Privilege: This term refers to the relationships between groups of people in society, to the social advantage or special treatment of a group or persons in a group. This advantage is unearned and results from how a group's identity is perceived as "normal" or "better." Privilege is lived out on an individual and societal scale. Privilege is not something a person deliberately opts into or out of, nor is it experienced by everyone in the same ways.

Ex. A man benefits from male privilege when his opinion is subconsciously valued more highly in a meeting, when he is paid more for equal work, or when he walks down a street without harassment or fear of sexual assault. White people benefit from white privilege when they can shop without being followed or monitored by staff who think they may shoplift, or when the majority of heroes in textbooks and movies look like them. For a white male, the combination of white privilege and male privilege can work together. A white man may have fewer risk factors for some stress-related illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes, while his complaints of pain are more likely to be taken seriously by his doctor. For more, see "intersectionality."

Queer: Umbrella term regarding sex, gender, and sexual orientation, often used by individuals who identify as somehow "other" from society's sexual, romantic, or gender norms. Although historically used in a derogatory manner, the term has since been reclaimed as a positive label by some members within that community.

Rape culture: An environment in which the objectification of and assault on human bodies, particularly in a sexual way, is normalized and tolerated. Rape culture primarily harms women and girls. Blaming rape victims for their assaults and maintaining a biased justice system are both parts of rape culture and how it is propagated.

Reproductive health care: Health services related to the reproductive system at all stages of life for all genders, including the menstrual cycle, fertility, and cancer.

Sex (biological): A scientific label assigned at birth that describes an individual's reproductive organs and whether they have XX chromosomes (female) or XY chromosomes (male). People whose biology varies from standards set by doctors' expectations of being "female" or "male" are typically called "intersex." Biological sex characteristics and traits of people who are said to be female or male are also variable.

Sexism: Refers to what supports male privilege and reinforces prejudice and discrimination against women and girls due to their gender and against people who do not conform to socially accepted gender roles. Human actions and speech can be sexist, as can institutions, policies, and practices.

Sexuality: A complex individual and social concept. Individually, sexuality includes the romantic and/or sexual feelings and desires that a person experiences. People's sexuality is also influenced by the social and cultural forces in which they find themselves.

Toxic masculinity: Refers to forms of masculinity that emphasize aggression, power, and control and sometimes violent or unhealthy sexuality. It deemphasizes weakness, caring, and vulnerability. Masculinity itself is not harmful; however, it is described as toxic when these forms of masculinity cultivate harm to self, others, and society. Toxic masculinity limits the humanity and compassion of men.

Transgender: Describes a person whose gender is different from the sex assigned or identified at birth. Some transgender individuals identify as men or as women; others don't identify with one of those words. Some people use this term to describe their identity; for others it serves as an umbrella term. Over time its meaning may change as language evolves. See "gender non-conforming."

Implementing Resolutions for Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action

(CA19.05.20)

Resolved:

1. To urge members, congregations, synods, churchwide ministries, social ministry organizations, church-related institutions, ecumenical partners, and all people of good will to be guided by this statement's convictions and commitments to resist and dismantle patriarchy and sexism, and to transform life in the church and in society;
2. To call upon members of this church to pray, work, and advocate for justice for all those affected by sexism and patriarchy and to draw upon this statement in forming their judgments and actions in daily life;
3. To encourage members to be guided by the ELCA social message "Gender-based Violence" (2015) in taking action, such as urging their congregations to implement policies and to become intentional sites of advocacy and support for local efforts that serve those affected by such violence;
4. To call upon all members of this church to reflect on how mass media (films, video games, etc.) and social media distort sex, gender, and sexuality and to address this problem in their own actions (especially their care for children);
5. To call upon congregational leaders, rostered and lay, to encourage women and girls to pursue leadership roles within congregations and in discernment toward rostered ministry;
6. To encourage ELCA congregations to present positive gender roles in their educational activities, preschools, and day care, and to urge youth-related ministries within this church to adopt positive modeling of gender equity in all leadership, programs, and educational events;
7. To urge congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization (CWO) to address inequities (in pay, senior leadership, availability of second and third calls, etc.), as well as the systemic causes of such inequities, for rostered and

- lay women of various backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences, and to advocate for adequate and equitable leave for all parents and families;
8. To call upon the Conference of Bishops, synods, and the churchwide organization to use gender-inclusive and expansive language for God, and to direct the ELCA worship team
 - (a) to use such language whenever it commissions, curates, or develops new liturgical and related educational resources,
 - (b) to supplement existing resources toward that end, and
 - (c) to explore the development of an inclusive language lectionary similar to the Psalter in Evangelical Lutheran Worship;
 9. To direct the Mission Advancement unit of the CWO to collaborate with the Office of the Bishop in creating a single page at ELCA.org where readers can access the existing resources of the ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation related to the concerns of this statement and to work to make those resources available in languages other than English;
 10. To call upon this church's advocacy and related ministries, such as ELCA Advocacy and ELCA World Hunger, to support and advocate for measures, policies, and laws consistent with this social statement and to give sustained attention to its convictions and commitments in the creation of programs and projects;
 11. To recognize past and present CWO efforts to address institutional sexism and foster gender justice in this church, and to urge sustained devotion of resources, such as support for CWO's Justice for Women program;
 12. To encourage the ministries of Women of the ELCA and Lutheran Men in Mission to continue and expand their work to address the issues identified in this social statement and to commend greater participation in these efforts;
 13. To call upon those engaged in publishing activities throughout the ELCA to continue and extend their support for gender equity in ELCA resources and communications through such dimensions as language, images, stories, Bible studies, themes, and representation of contributors;

14. To urge faculty, staff, and administrators of ELCA-related colleges, universities, and seminaries to renew their efforts to develop syllabi and best practices that affirm and promote the gifts of women from varied identities and backgrounds;
15. To call upon rostered and lay congregational leaders, synodical and CWO staff, social ministry organizations, and faculty and staff at ELCA colleges, seminaries, and universities to renew their efforts to welcome, care for, and support the lives and gifts of LGBTQIA+ persons and to oppose discrimination against these persons so that they may live into the promise of gender justice envisioned in this social statement;
16. To call on the church in all its expressions and related agencies, organizations, and institutions to embed and incorporate anti-sexism training and protocols in their ongoing work, including appropriate adaptations to boundaries training for rostered ministers, and to create institutional resources to support rostered ministers who experience sexual misconduct or gender-based harassment, as well as pastoral care resources for all affected by sexism;
17. To direct the ELCA Church Council to establish a process for public repentance regarding the sins of patriarchy and sexism and establish a churchwide day of confession and repentance no later than the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly;
18. To call upon the Office of the Bishop, in collaboration with appropriate units in the CWO, to establish and oversee processes for implementation of and accountability for these resolutions and to report to the fall meeting of ELCA Church Council in 2021.

A social statement on...

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action

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